

The criminal chooses his victim, area of operation, hour, weapon, modus operandi and strategy against detection. It is left to the Police to link up the rare clues, identify the criminal, chase him till he is apprehended and bring to book, with sufficient evidence, the criminal and his accomplices.

A veteran Police Officer has revealed in this selection of blood-curdling and spine-chilling cases of the devilry — some motivated by the lure of money, some others by sex and glamour, yet some others by a spirit of vengeance — some of the most gruesome crimes in Indian crime history. All the exciting glitter of the world of vice, the constant life-and-death struggle with the law, the war of nerves, wits and firearms and the process of detection leading right into the criminal's den have been fully captured in the narration and enlivened by a charming style of presentation.

B. S. Chaturvedi, Deputy Inspector-General of Police, is the Chief Security Officer of the Northern Railways at New Delhi. Writing is his hobby and his real-life crime stories have appeared in various journals in English and Hindi.



AN ORIENT PAPERBACK
PUBLISHED BY HIND POCKET BOOKS



S. CHATURVEDI

an Police Service



FACE TO FACE WITH CRIMINALS



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Face to Face with Criminals

Cover design by Satish Sud

Published by

Hind Pocket Books (P) Ltd.

G. T. Road, Delhi-32

Text Printed at

Ashoka Offset Works, Delhi

Cover printed at

Shiksha Bharati Press, Delhi-32

FOREWORD

I have read with interest the book written by Shri B. S. Chaturvedi. This book of short stories based on some of the interesting and complex cases that he had to investigate during his career, succeeds in retaining the interest of the reader while at the same time gives a glimpse of some of the details of investigation. The author deserves commendation for successfully achieving these twin objectives.

The detection of crime is a fascinating subject for readers the world over. Crime detection is both an art and a science. It requires an understanding of human psychology and an insight into the behavioural patterns of criminals with varying social and economic background. The intuition also plays no small part in this process. Shri Chaturvedi has succeeded in bringing out these various facets of the investigative work.

I hope that the book would be well received as a welcome addition to the literature on crime. I trust the Police personnel would also find it illuminating. My good wishes.

Y. B. CHAVAN

New Delhi

Home Minister of India

PREFACE

Crime originates from lust — lust for sex, lust for power, lust for possessions. It feeds on egomania. Egomania isolates the obsessed person from the stream of life. A person so obsessed utterly disregards any interest but of his own self. Gradually he becomes an anti-social being and renounces all reverence for life, sanctity of the soul that is in others, and the normal values of normal men. Cruelty is the dominant trait of these criminals and hypocrisy their cloak. It is the function of the policeman to protect the society from the aggression of these ego-centred individuals.

Policemen are trained to study the psychology, the physiognomy and the expressions of these people, who in ordinary language, come to be called criminals.

In these stories, I have attempted to delineate the characters of these criminals, to describe their technique and their methods and their misdeeds. I have tried to describe as succinctly as possible how intelligent, well-trained and assiduous officials of the Police and the Detectives pursue the perpetrators of crime, expose their designs, recover and restore what the criminals have exploited from the simple, unsophisticated persons, who form the bulk of society.

In these stories one significant moral emerges; few criminals have ever been prosperous. A criminal is debarred from peace and happiness. His life entails upon him a physical and mental strain to which he ultimately succumbs. Seldom can he escape from the ever alert and dutiful policemen. The activities of criminals, though may lead to temporary success, are ultimately vain, fruitless and bring them to their inevitable end.

All these stories have their foundation on facts. These are based on the author's own experience as a Police Officer. The names of characters and of places have, however, been changed.

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Kiss of Death

THE symphony orchestra played music in an auditorium in Delhi. The evening was foggy and cold. In the cosy seats people had settled down, all wrapped in thick woollens.

The concert opened with mild music. Viola, cello, double bass (all stringed instruments) were in unison. Other instruments played in soft tones. The violin of the conductor brought forth the best notes. His fingers moved, the bow quivered — and sweet music flowed out. Tunes followed tunes, each sweeter, each more enchanting. Symphony music followed the classical combinations. It bubbled and throbbed filling the hall with waves of intoxicating melody.

Some of those who listened sat with fixed gaze and others half-closed their eyes. They clapped at each break, and again lapsed into silence sitting statue-like in the dim light. They floated in a world of joy. The music quietened into a delicate slow movement. The horns and trumpets announced the final movement — the piano following the theme with a cadenza and both pianist and orchestra plunged into a lovely dialogue bringing it to a close. They continued to float till they came down with a thud — not on the hard ground but in the cushy seats in which they had been. The dream broke. The orchestra was silent. The evening's programme was over. They clapped and applauded. Some walked to the dais and shook hands with the director. Others drew their garments round them and walked out.

A young lady gracefully stepped up to the stage.

"I am Meena. I like your orchestra. It played so perfectly. Its music is so touching." She chirped sweetly.

The conductor had noticed his lady admirer. Her pink silk sari with brocade border, the Kashmiri shawl

hanging on her shoulders backwards, she lightly holding both its edges in her hand just above her waist, her brocade blouse exposing a fair, large, semi-circular segment below the neck, her well-shaped bosom prominently below it — all gave her smart figure a refreshing charm. He took a deep breath; looked at her intently.

"Thanks, mademoiselle. Good of you to think that way. I am D'Souza."

"Will you come down please for a minute, Mr D'Souza? I'll talk to you."

He obeyed

"I love music. I play piano."

"Very good."

"I like the way you play on your violin."

"Thank you." He glanced at her.

"I'd be happy to have it played solo."

He kept quiet.

"You keep busy?"

"Yes ma'm."

"You may be free some times. Could you spare your time for me please?"

"I practise when I'm free. This instrument needs practice." He still held the violin in one hand.

"Do come over to my house sometime. I'll take you in my car." She gave the address of her house and her telephone number and continued, "Please, promise you'll come."

"Yes ma'm, I will." He couldn't say no. He again bowed.

She walked away boastfully and nimbly

She drove the Violinist to her flat on a cold misty evening in January. In her sitting room fire had been lit in the fireplace. She drew the thick curtains. Both settled in cushioned settee near the fire. He felt the warmth and looked at the paintings hung on the walls. She walked on the thick carpet into the side room. He

saw the big piano by the wall on one side of the fire place. He placed his violin-case on a small table near the piano. He gazed round the room and then at the fire.

She brought cups of steaming hot coffee and sat on the same settee. They talked of weather, of music and of instruments.

"You are an artist, I'm an amateur," she said.

"You are also an artist in your way. You love art and practise art," he replied.

"That's for fun."

"That makes your life full, perhaps."

"Not exactly, I feel forlorn." She was silent. She looked round the room. Beyond the windows fog had deepened.

"Please, don't think that way. Practise on that instrument and play on it." He pointed to the piano.

"No! I'm lonely. I'm like a lost person in a desert."

"How is that ma'm? May I know what afflicts you?"

"The vastness of desolation." She looked at him with eyes which had opened wider.

"You told me, you love music. You play on piano."

"Yes. I can play on piano."

"Then don't strike a discordant note in life, please. Music lovers should be happy and mirthful. You are a pretty bud that would bloom. Your art will blossom. Be happy, ma'm."

"Oh, Mr. D'Souza, you are so wise. So pleasant."

"Thank you. Please tell me how long you practise on piano." He tried to turn the trend of conversation.

"Whenever I feel like it. I learnt my music lessons on it. I'm fond of it."

"Please play on it and fill this room with music."

"I'll. She rose, sat near the piano and played on it. Its notes reached beyond the thick curtains of the room. They were full of melody.

D'Souza looked intently at the lady. She faced the instrument and her back was towards him. He

fixed his eyes on the nape of her slender neck. Her long dark tresses were piled up in a bouffant. They descended into little stray curls on the nape. He then half closed his eyes as the notes of the piano were picked by his musical ears.

When she finished and rose, he stood up and appreciated, "You are marvellous. You are so perfect. You are a real artist."

She blushed and smiled, "I'm making an effort. I am glad you liked it."

"I love music, I like artists."

She was happy. Looked at him. At his curly black hair, the broad forehead, and his handsome face.

He fixed his gaze at her. She was a bewitching beauty. Colour rose to her cheeks. She spoke softly, "Mr. D'Souza or shall I say D'Souza. Sit close to me, please."

"Yes, my lady."

"I am Meena for you, D'Souza."

"Meena, I am so happy."

He then played on his violin with gusto.

One night Meena was alone in the house. She retired to bed early after dinner. She felt tired of the boredom. She had practised on piano the whole evening. It was so wet outside. The rain had spluttered the whole day. The wind had a razor-like chill. No one moved out. She felt she was in a solitary cell. She tried to read a book, but could not. It was all so dull. She put it on the table.

Near the table lamp on the same table was a framed photograph of a young man. The young man's hair receded above the forehead giving a look of early baldness. His cheek-bones were high and the face below had a triangular shape, the apex being the chin. His small eyes appeared to be mysterious.

She continued to look at him. She thought he had been kind to her, he loved her. He took her for long

drives and day-long picnics. They beheld the scenic beauty together. They rowed in lakes. Walked on sea beaches. Sometimes she ran ahead, her bare feet sinking in thick sands. She looked back at her foot-marks which she left. They disappeared soon. He followed, his frail body being carried forward with slow strides. Was it that she had left no impressions for others to guide and follow? He merely pursued her because he had to. He could not help it. It was all mechanical. No! It should not happen. She should not be followed for selfish purpose. She had a talent. She would make a mark in life. She would create impressions on others, then the world would run after her. She was destined for a higher existence. She decided. Turned her eyes from the photograph, took a paper and scribbled a letter.

She switched off the lights. Tried to sleep and closed her eyes. In that darkness thoughts still stole in.

She was growing in stature. That small rickety figure was still pursuing her. She was climbing on a mountain, her delicate palm grasped by the hand of another man. He was big, strong and masculine. He helped her to that rugged ascent. He was her support and her path-finder. How could she leave him? How could her life be complete without him? No, he should belong to her. She was bent upon possessing him. She clung to his sturdy shoulder and he turned round. She discerned below the curly dark hair, his healthy, handsome face. He smiled. And lo! he was the Violinist. They both climbed to the top. Feather-like clouds floated around the peak. She and he were artists. She was bound to reach the pinnacle of art with him. She was close to him. She stretched her arms to catch the clouds. He clasped her in his strong arms. She was thrilled.

She lighted the table lamp, scowled at the photograph of that weak man, turned it upside down and

put it under the bed.

She was alone in that room. Her spirits dampened. It was still raining. Heaviness crept in her head and pain in her limbs. She suffered an agonising ache in her heart. At one moment she was tossed on the crest of ambition, on the other fell in the anguish of passion.

The violinist came often to her flat. Whenever he was free from work, he turned his motor-cycle in that direction. Even his pre-occupation with orchestra lasting late in the evening did not deter him to keep up his engagements with Meena. He regaled her with tunes of violin. She enchanted him with captivating notes of piano. At times they talked for long hours. Evenings mingled in nights with spells of music and sweet conversation. Sometimes they dined together. The hours they spent were full of music and full of love. When the Violinist used to leave, she listened to the sound of the motor-bike receding in far distant. She would stand for long at the door, her ears eager to catch that very faint sound which melted into silence. She would then lie on her bed full of thoughts and desires.

It was the dance of New Year's Eve. Gents circled round with their partners. Feet moved at slow pace and at times with speed. Flowing sarees and spinning skirts wafted perfume. It was celestial. Meena and D'Souza also danced. He was smartly dressed and she looked a charming, glamorous girl. Suddenly the band burst forth at high pitch. The whirl of dancing partners pervaded the room. He hugged her closer and she nodded in assent with a smile. As the lights dimmed, hilarity and joy rose from within. There was clapping, full-throated ovation and squeaking giggles and laughter.

They walked away from the crowd, sat beside a table and ordered some drinks.

He then was kissing her full on the mouth. He continued to seal her lips with his own.

She was lively and full of love. She was burning with ambition and desire. She was romantic. Her nature was to fall in love with all her zest. She enjoyed a whirlwind of romance.

On a moon-lit night at Agra, Taj Mahal stood in all its magnificence. White marble dome glistened in solemnity and grace. River Jamuna flowed full. Its emerald water reflected the glory of the delicate structure and the moon above it. People in boats rowed to behold the beauty. Tourists and sightseers lingered on lawns, walks and in gardens.

About six miles down the current in the Jamuna some boatmen rowed homewards. Suddenly the breeze grew fast. Scenes changed over the changeless Jamuna. Clouds floated and then gathered. A broad patch of dark cloud was swept on the moon. Skies rumbled. Showers fell. They noticed a splash in waters in a streak of lightning. They thought that a weighty object had fallen. They rowed with speed in that direction. The waters churned in the storm. Current was fast. Two boatmen jumped into the waters and searched. They came up and again dived deeper. Long time elapsed before they could search and recover the body of a young woman. The body had drifted into mid-stream. The boatmen found the woman dead. They put her upside down in the boat. Water flowed out of her mouth and nostrils. They attempted to revive her but she did not breathe. They brought her to the bank.

One of the boatmen who was in his fifties later stated, "She was young and good looking. She appeared to be from a town and not from a village. Her clothes were different from our womenfolk. She wore light ornaments of gold — only two thin bangles on one wrist and one thin chain with a pretty piece

in it, in her neck. We did not touch any of her ornament. Our tribe is honest, though we are poor. God alone knows how she strayed on the high bank of Jamunaji. She might have taken a false step in the dark and fell into it. The waters here are deep and fast. We know every spot in this river."

One of them reached the Police Station to inform of this incident. The Police Station was at a distance. A Police party headed by a Senior Sub-Inspector came with the boatman to the river bank. In the lights that they carried with them, he inspected the woman and found her dead. He observed two injuries by firearm on the right temple of the woman. Her body bore no other injuries. The only identity mark was a horizontal about one inch long thin scar type mark below the left shoulder. The back of her blouse had got torn exposing her shoulder and this mark. He photographed the dead body. He wrote the inquest report. The gold chain the woman had been wearing had intertwined in her hair and neck. A pendant hung in it. On the reverse side of the pendant was engraved "SHEILA."

By dawn, clouds cleared. The night's drizzle was light. It was soaked in the surface of the earth. The Sub-Inspector and his men searched the ground for long. He walked along the bank of the river towards the upstream. At a spot a little distance away from the bank, he found the track-marks of car tyres. These track-marks led to the kutchra road, which joined the Agra-Fatehabad Road at some distance. A car had been up and down this kutchra road. It had, apparently, taken a turn round near the bank to return. Ground on the bank was wet making the impressions of the car-tyres clear and discernible. Not far from the site, where the car had been turned round was a broken horse-shoe shaped rising land. Its ends opened facing the river. The ground inside it was level.

So far the search had been fruitless. Parallel

tyre-marks looked prominent in the morning sun. The Sub-Inspector photographed them at several places. He had tyre-mark impressions taken and preserved. He then walked inside the horse-shoe shaped piece of land. He looked at the ground and found some stub-ends and some half-smoked cigarettes littered at one place. He examined some of the half-burnt cigarettes. They bore the brand-name, "CAPSTAN" on them. He collected and took them in possession. At a short distance were some blood marks. Some blood had collected at a place and had been soaked in the earth. He photographed it. Then scrapped the blood-soiled earth and wrote recovery memos of the blood and pieces of cigarettes.

The Sub-Inspector and his men continued to search other places for long outside this horse-shoe shaped piece of land. They peered through crevices in land and inside the thickets and bushes. His eyes caught the sight of a shining object inside a thorny bush. He noticed a bottle lying in the bush. He took out his handkerchief and wrapped it over his right hand. Then he crouched and extended his arm inside the thicket. He caught hold of the bottle-end and brought it out. It was an empty whisky bottle. He examined it closely and discerned some finger-impressions on it. He wrapped the bottle carefully in soft cotton and entered it in the recovery-memo.

Autopsy confirmed two injuries on the temple of the body. Two bullets had penetrated the brain, damaged it and got lodged in it. According to the doctor there had been haemorrhage and clot formation of blood. Laceration of brain tissues. Specules of skull bones were found in the lacerated brain substance. Death would have been instantaneous. The bullets were those fired by a .32 bore weapon — revolver or pistol. No other injury was found on the body. No other damage had been done to the body. The Sub-Inspector took in his possession these two bullets and sealed them.

Agra police published the photographs of the dead body in all the newspapers giving her name as "Sheila" as revealed by the pendant worn by her, and other details in brief about the place from which it was recovered and the probable age, descriptive roll, etc., of the lady. Copies of photographs were also sent to all the States in India for record in their Crime record Sections and for publication in their Criminal Intelligence Gazette.

At a Police Station in New Delhi a young lady appeared at 10 a.m. She looked worried and in hurry.

"How may I help you, please? What brings you here?" asked the Station House Officer.

"Here is this newspaper. See this photograph in it." She spread the paper across the table. "This is not my photograph. I am Sheila."

"Why bother, madam! There may be other ladies bearing this name," he carefully studied the photograph.

"No, no, I say, she is not me", she screamed.

"Why bother then? I also see that this is not you." He looked at the lady and fixed his eyes on the newspaper.

"This picture resembles my friend Meena. We were together last week. This could not be. I am sure she could'nt have drowned so far away. It's all wrong. My mind is blurred and confused. Please help me," she spoke.

"Ma'm, what help can the police extend to you? You are not sure of what you say. Please be composed."

"No I'm sure. Please register this report."

She opened her hand bag, took a pen and paper and scribbled a report.

The Station House Officer agreed to lodge her report and asked her to leave the newspaper with him. He suggested to her to get in touch with her friend Meena.

"I've done it already. I don't have a phone in



my apartment. Meena has a phone. I drove to her flat. I didn't find her. All doors were closed. They may be sleeping for late hours. I didn't disturb them. Her husband returned from leave recently."

"Please tell me about your friend Meena. Her telephone number. I'll dial her Phone and find for you."

"Please do that."

He dialled the Phone number. It rang on the other side for some time but without any response.

"I don't get a reply."

"Don't worry for that please. I'll find her myself. They are behaving like a newly-wed couple. Please write this report in your records. I now go." She walked out of the Police Station with fast steps.

Rajender, an officer, filed a complaint in the Court of Sub-Divisional Magistrate, New Delhi, against D'Souza, resident of Delhi. In the complaint he requested for finding out his wife Meena with whom D'Souza contracted intimacy and abducted her from the flat in which she resided and for which he paid rent every month. These criminal acts were committed when he was serving in NEFA (North East Frontier Agency) on Government duty.

A portion of the complaint read: "I was married to my wife Shrimati Meena according to Hindu rites, at Amritsar. She is, 22 years of age. The accused D'Souza is a man of ordinary means directing an orchestra at Delhi. He dresses well and poses to have contacts with high personages. He is fond of young girls and ladies and bears an immoral character. He entertains them well to give false impression of wealth and prosperity. After abducting my wife the accused had taken her to Simla and Kufri. He had committed adultery with her at Delhi, Simla and Kufri. The petitioner prays for the warrants to be issued against the accused. His wife may be recovered and restored to him at the earliest. In case of delay, she may be put underground or murdered."

The Court ordered: "From the aforesaid statement it is prima facie made out that D'Souza enticed away the wife of the complainant knowing her to be the wife of the complainant with intent that she may have illicit intercourse with him. I accordingly order that D'Souza be summoned as accused u/s 498 I.P.C. —(Enticing or taking away or detaining with criminal intent a married woman).

"Let now, bailble warrants be issued against D'Souza. As this case is of very urgent nature and time is an important factor in the matter, warrants be given, by hand, to the complainant."

Carrying these warrants of arrest, Rajender produced them to Superintendent of Police, South District, New Delhi. D'Souza was promptly arrested from his apartment while practising on violin.

Concerted efforts by Delhi Police led to no trace of Mrs. Meena, wife of Rajender. Full particulars of this lady had been obtained. Copies of her photographs were distributed to all Station House Officers.

"Could you please tell me, Mr. Rajender, any peculiar identity marks on the person of your wife, Mrs. Meena?" questioned the Superintendent of Police, to Mr. Rajender. The latter had been called to his office.

"None peculiar, except that she had a mark at the back of left shoulder."

"What mark could it be? Please be clear about its dimensions."

"About half an inch, in the middle of the left shoulder-blade."

"Since how long? I presume it was a birth mark?"

"No. Meena told me that in her childhood, she fell down on rough stones and sustained a gaping injury. Her skin split. The doctors put stitches. It was a mark of stitches which persisted and was permanent."

"Bad luck. I am sure, you may be aware of peculiarities, if any, in Mrs. Meena's nature," the Superintendent of Police suggested.

"I could not understand you."

"I mean did she suffer with insomnia, depression, boredom, sought escape from life, was fed up with what world had to give her?"

"No. Not at all. She was happy and pleasant. At times, she was not ready to accept realities of life, and at others was tied up inside herself."

"She loved you, was devoted to you, I presume."

"I also presumed until I left for NEFA".

"How is it that you suspect D'Souza of enticing her?"

"It is a sad story. I'll place the facts in Court. You are an intelligent officer. I'll only say that a pretty wife is more of a liability these days than an asset," Rajender sighed and kept quite.

D'Souza, the director of orchestra, denied all the charges levelled against him by Rajender when his statement was recorded by the Magistrate. He deposed that "he was not aware of the fact that Meena had been married to Rajender. She was fond of music and of orchestra. She herself played on piano well and liked listening to my violin."

"I am an artist. I wish that all art may flourish and flower. All artists are my friends. My world is of music and orchestra. I am devoting my life to it and am dedicated to it. Mrs. Meena loved good life. All those who frequent the clubs like nice life. She asked me to accompany her to Simla and Kufri. I thought I could make some money by collecting together violin-lovers where I could display my art. I did succeed in my efforts. I also wished to visit Kufri for a change. No bad motives prompted me to visit Kufri from Simla.

"Mrs. Meena was a gay person. I was never aware of her movements as I had no personal interest in her. I never enticed her and nor did I allow myself in any

vulgarity with her as has been alleged against me in the charge. I am innocent. I emphatically say that I am innocent of all the charges."

The Station House Officer at New Delhi to whom Miss Sheila had handed over a copy of the newspaper in which a photograph of a woman had been published, reported to Superintendent of Police, South, New Delhi.

"Sir! This copy of photograph in the newspaper tallies with that of Mrs. Meena, who is reported to be missing."

"I'll study it" He compared the two photographs for some time. He compared these with photographs published in Criminal Intelligence Gazette and with copies of photographs which were sent to police officers.

He exclaimed, "Yes! You are right. All the photographs are of the same lady -- Mrs Meena. The picture in the newspaper bears, perhaps, a wrong name 'Sheila'. I'm informing police officers at Agra just now."

Police officers of Agra and Delhi met. I was one of those who attended this meeting. At that time I was posted as Superintendent of Police, Agra. We exchanged and sifted information that was available about this case. We discussed about those persons who may be suspected.

Next morning we reached the apartment of D'Souza. Policeman had been posted earlier to keep a watch unobtrusively. His movements had already been shadowed by the police, since after his release on bail. He sat in the verandah. He was cleaning a violin. Its bow lay on a table nearby. He offered us chairs and we sat down.

"Mr. D'Souza, you are a renowned violinist. We wish to discuss with you some matters."

"About tunes of violin, about music?"

"No. About your relationship with the lady, Mrs. Meena."

"Oh, that glamorous girl has played hell with me. Her husband says she has disappeared. He blames me. A false blame. He is a treacherous guy."

"You don't know where she is gone?"

"Girls these days are slippery. She gave a slip to her own husband," he replied in surprise and disgust. Then continued, "I didn't know she was married. She was posing to be a "Miss". She deceived me and I am in a soup."

"Where is your wife?"

"I don't have any. I am a bachelor. That's why I was duped."

"You were friendly with her, Mr. D'Souza?"

"Yes, in a way."

"And in love with her," I suggested.

"I can't deny it wholly or admit it wholly."

"What do you mean by this?" I asked.

"Mr. D'Souza can't deny. It was love at first sight. It began in the auditorium at the end of the orchestra show," the Delhi Police Officer spoke.

"Yes, yes. How do you know that?" D'Souza was amazed.

"I know of your movements. Your drives with Meena. Your drinks and dances with her. Your honeymoon like trips to Simla and Kufri with her. And the playing of violin to her on ice-covered slopes of hills at Kufri and your warm embrace of her thereafter. What have you to say to that?"

D'Souza was taken aback. He grew pale. He appeared flabbergasted. Kept silent for some time and then uttered these words softly "Yes, lust was sprouting within me, not love. I love art, live for art."

"So you should know the other place where she must have gone last," I questioned.

"I couldn't understand. Please be more clear," he said

"To Agra."

"I really don't know that. I lost interest in that girl the moment I realised she had a husband."

"Very chivalrous of you," these words just escaped my lips. "You mean you did not pursue her to Agra?"

"No, not at all. I can't leave Delhi for a minute. I have so many engagements to fulfil here."

"But you found time to visit Simla and Kufri," the Delhi Police Officer said.

"I admit. It was a commercial proposition combined with pleasure. I earned something there."

"Why not, the abiding love of Meena," the Delhi Police Officer spoke sarcastically. He continued, "You stayed in Cecil Hotel at Simla and you were at Kufri on these dates," he gave the dates of D'Souza's stay at Kufri.

"Yes, that's right. You seem to know more about me than I myself do," D'Souza was surprised.

"You arranged private shows of violin performance and danced with Meena in the evenings at Simla."

"Good gracious. Yes. Yes," he nodded.

"D'Souza, tell us all about your stay at Kufri with your lady love," we asked.

"At Kufri, sheet of ice covered the slopes and hill tops. Fir and other trees were bare without leaves. People skied — gents, ladies, children and they enjoyed. It was a great fun. The air was fresh." he narrated.

"The season was gay and you enjoyed life with Meena," the Police Officer suggested.

"In a way, yes. I played on my violin."

"And she sang I believe," the Officer said.

"No, no, that is not right. You are now guessing, sir."

"You should have returned from Simla to Delhi with Meena at the end of your holiday," I said.

"Yes, that's right."

"Please tell us of her whereabouts now. About your last meeting with her."

"I really don't know. You've all confused me. I am in trouble due to her."

"You deserve to be in trouble. Was Meena like

a small pebble that was lost in the hills at Kufri and found in the bed of a river? You pretend to be innocent. You are not. We'll search your room." We showed him the search warrants.

He was again quiet. When we were about to enter his room, he whispered, "Girls these days weave a knotty web around them in which they get entangled and from which they cannot escape. Thank God, I'm out of it."

In this search nothing of interest was found. A few slips of paper written by Meena about dates and time when D'Souza should meet her, were recovered in a leather suitcase. No other love-letters, no pistol, no revolver, no ammunition was found. In a shelf were kept books on music. On the top-shelf were half-a-dozen violins in their cases. In another small box were some instruments to repair violins and bows. The search was in detail and lasted for some time.

We had already arranged to get the photographs of finger impressions of D'Souza, without his knowledge.

When we departed, D'Souza remarked, "Sirs, in me you'll discover love instead of trickery, love for persons, love for art. I am a lover of all that is good on this Earth."

In the official residence of the Superintendent of Police, I sat in the drawing room in the evening. Rajender sat on the same sofa close to me. He puffed a cigarette. The Superintendent of Police was on a chair near us. We had evening tea together.

Rajender, a person of thin-built, was in a jovial mood as he had learnt from his own sources about the search of D'Souza's apartment in the morning by us. He held the glass plate in his left hand as he ate a piece of cake that was in it. He then waved his right hand aloft as he spoke — "Almighty above watches our actions here. Those who plan doom of others, meet their doom here."

"Yes, that's true. D'Souza meant to harm you. We had to trouble him in the morning", I said.

"Harm to me, you've used a mild term for that wretch. He has disrupted my family life. He stealthily prowled at my wife while I was far away, as you know." His squeakish voice was now a mild shrill. His thin lips closed on a narrow long mouth mounted on a sharp descending chin converging to a narrow point.

"It's really impossible to fathom your injured feelings", I added.

The Superintendent of Police poured hot tea in our cups and looked at him.

"Don't you both agree with me?" Rajender spoke as if in some doubt.

"We both do agree," the Superintendent briefly replied.

Rajender turned his lanky face towards me. He had put the smoked cigarette in the ashtray, offered me one. It was of 'Capstan' brand. I noticed his receding hair and his forehead rounding into them at some distance. His eyes were like small shining pieces of dark glasses, deeply set, which moved quickly but revealed little. He still held the glass plate in his left hand and ate a piece of sandwich.

"I'm thankful to both of you. You've helped me in my anguish. I know my Meena is gone from me for ever. That sly crook rubs his bow against those wires or strings and produces uncouth sound to entangle girls in his snare. This time he has rubbed me on the wrong side and I'll see to it. I'm a determined fellow," he closed the fist of his bony hand. Rajender displayed his excitement.

"Forget that please. Be cheerful. Have your tea," the Police Superintendent requested. He also sat down.

Next moment Rajender was cheerful. We talked on many other topics. He narrated his life in NEFA, his experiences there of social customs, cultural traditions in that part of the country. We found him a

good conversationalist. A suppressed trait of superficiality and hypocrisy came to surface at times.

Ice cream in glass cups was served to all of us. It was delicious and we enjoyed it. We then moved on the lawns outside. Rajender inhaled the fresh breeze by taking deep breaths.

"I need more oxygen, I'm a wounded soul", he said.

"It would improve your health", the Police Superintendent replied.

"I'm healthy." He displayed his bony arms.

After a while, he thanked the Police Superintendent South and drove away.

We rushed inside to see if the finger impressions of Rajender left on glass plates that he held on ice cream cup had been developed. The experts were busy at their job.

"In case the finger impressions tally," the Police Superintendent spoke to me in the drawing room.

"I'll go ahead," I replied.

"Think of it. Will that be a sufficient evidence?"

"Yes, why not? Photographs of tyres of his car and their impressions have already been compared with our photographs and impressions. They tally." I stuck to my point.

"That's hardly of any value. So many cars run on roads in Delhi. So many own them here. Car impressions may be the same of the tyres of many other cars."

"You are right. But at present we are in a realm of hypothesis. Let's wait for the result of these impressions."

We again walked into the ante room. The finger impressions had been developed and photographed.

Next morning, taking copies of photographs with me, I left for Agra.

At Agra the photographs of finger-impressions of Rajender and those found on the whisky bottle at the

banks of river Jamuna and developed by Sub-Inspector, were sent to Finger Print Bureau for comparison and with request for early communication of report.

When the special messenger brought the comparison result from Finger Print Bureau, we were reassured. The finger-impressions on whisky bottle and those of Rajender on glass plates and ice-cream cup at the residence of the Police Superintendent, tallied.

I drove to Delhi again and went straight to the Police Superintendent's office. We discussed and planned. It was decided that we both will have the flat of Rajender searched in the afternoon.

When we pressed the call-bell the doors did not open. We kept on ringing. After a little while Rajender opened the door. He had been sleeping that afternoon and apologized. We showed him the warrants and he was shocked. "You, don't spare your friends even," he mumbled. We kept quiet. All through he talked little. We directed him to unlock the boxes and suitcases. Costly sarces and shawls were found in some boxes. On the dressing table still lay articles of ladies cosmetics. In two boxes woollen suits and other clothes of Rajender were kept. At the bottom of one of the boxes a letter was recovered, "This is the last letter that I got from Meena," he said. In an envelope were kept a number of snap-shots and photographs.

In the bed room was a 'Godrej' steel almirah. When Rajender opened it, it was seen that costly jewellery owned by Meena was kept in it. From a shelf one pistol was recovered. He promptly produced a licence for it. But we decided to take the pistol and its ammunition in police possession. It was a .32 bore pistol.

The letter of Meena was brief. She wrote: "A tumult was raging within me. You are far away. You have chosen to live far from me. I am a boat without oars. Someone has taken the oars and I am being rowed far — far away. So Adieu!" This was the letter Meena perhaps scribbled on the night when she was

agitated and took a decision.

"I thought that Meena had scribbled these lines in a poetic mood, or else she had a dream and had described it. I took it lightly. I didn't realise that she was playing fool with our wedded life. That sly D'Souza had intruded into our home." Rajender uttered those words and sighed.

We arrested Rajender and he was remanded to judicial custody for some time.

I requested the Police Superintendent to send for Sheila, who lodged a report at a Police Station at Delhi. She was called and I talked to her.

She said, "Meena was my intimate friend." On Sundays I spent most of my time in her flat. On other week days, I keep busy. I work in a government office. We were both fond of playing on piano and music. She told me about D'Souza, a master violinist, whom we met. He is a perfect gentleman. And if you listen to his violin, you'll be spell-bound. He plays so well. Oh! he is very nice."

"Madam! please tell me how a pendant on which was inscribed your name, was found in the neck of your friend Meena?"

"It is simple. Meena was fond of dressing well. She was pretty and good-looking. At times we borrowed each other's jewellery for evening wear. She was to go to a party with her husband one evening. I had a new gold chain with a new pendant made. She liked it. Put it on her neck and gave me her twined-design gold chain instead. That chain is still in my neck. And she, poor thing, was never heard of since then. Her husband says, she was taken away by Mr. D'Souza, the violinist. That was unbelievable. And now I hear of this another incident. What has world come to? She kept quiet and I thanked her.

The Ballistic Expert's opinion proved that the 32 bullets which were found embedded in the brain of

Meena had been fired by the .32 bore pistol owned by Rajender. Chemical Examiner's report showed that the blood-stains found on earth in the sample collected from the horse-shoe shaped piece of land were of human blood.

I talked to Rajender in detail. At first he feigned innocence but when he was confronted with the evidence in our possession against him, he bleated like a lamb. He said to me, sometimes in whispering tone, and sometimes in his usual squeaking voice, "I confide in you implicitly. You please try to understand the anguish of my embittered and insulted soul. When I returned on leave from NEFA after long stay in that distant land, I learnt at my house that Meena had gone to Simla and Kufri with D'Souza. I left by the next available train taking with me the powerful camera that I had bought at NEFA with an idea that if I met Meena at Simla, we will go out together and photograph the natural beauties that she liked most. She was inclined to be poetic and I wished to have a new romance with her after such a long period of separation.

"I looked for her in all good hotels at Simla -- in Clarkes', Grand and Cecil. I discovered from the bookings of Cecil Hotel that D'Souza and Meena had left in the morning for Kufri for two days. They had told the Manager of the Hotel to reserve accommodation for them after that period again. I pursued them to Kufri. The season was cold. It was the month of January. I reached Kufri. It was a busy season of skiing. There were a number of people there. I searched for Meena. She was not to be seen anywhere and I was getting disappointed. As she had a poetic nature, I looked for her in spots of seclusion and beauty. And I was surprised, nay, shocked when I saw two human figures sitting on slopes of ice close together. I was determined to reach near them stealthily. I crouched, crawled and moved forward unseen. I held my powerful camera. That was my armament at

that time. I arrived at a good spot, hid myself behind two boulders and took breath. I had so far fixed my gaze at those figures of Meena and D'Souza.

"I focussed my camera. D'Souza embraced her. She was in her arms. He kissed her and kissed her and kissed her on her lips and I, and I clicked and clicked and clicked my camera. God knows how many times I clicked my camera, and took snaps of them as if I was handling an automatic rifle and pressing its trigger." He was panting and sweating. His thin bony hands were shaking.

I told him to be cool and collected and not to lose his balance. He waited for a while, asked for a glass of water, took two or three gulps of it and continued.

"Sir! I had already lost my balance at that sight. My honour had been injured. My manhood had been insulted. I had to avenge it. Had I been armed with a rifle, I'd have shot both of them dead there and then. I returned to Simla and from there came to Delhi. Meena returned later. I was bitter against her. But I didn't reveal my bitterness or dislike of her. I had already decided on my scheme of things. Two days after her arrival, I asked her to come with me to Agra for a pleasure trip. She agreed. We left for Agra in our Fiat car. We had our lunch in a hotel at Agra. In the evening we had some pack-dinner with us from the hotel. We saw the Taj in the moon-lit night and lingered there long. We decided to have dinner at a quiet spot far away from the crowd. We drove a few miles on a road which ran not far away from the Jamuna river. I was at the steering wheel. I turned on a kutchra road and shortly we were on the banks of the Jamuna. We walked on the high banks and then came to a place which looked protected and quiet. We sat there. I drank to my heart's content that night till I emptied the whisky bottle. I hurled it across. Puffed a number of cigarettes. She opened the tiffin-box and we ate our dinner.

"I felt drunk and was losing my senses. I stood up. She stood close to me. I took out the snaps from my pocket and confronted her with them in the torch light that I flashed. She grew pale and nervous. I took out my loaded pistol and shouted at her, 'You have betrayed me and I take my revenge' — I don't know what happened thereafter. I don't know whether she pressed the trigger or I. I fell down and she slumped down beside me. She was bleeding. She was dead and gone. I didn't think it wise to carry that dead load with me. So I decided to let her go in the waters of Jamuna and threw her dead body in the river. She had been a sailor in love and had floated in many hearts. So she was given a hero's burial, a sailor's burial." He paused for a while, pondered and was silent.

Then he burst out — "The anguish in my heart that I had lost her, the insult and humiliation that she had hurled at me, had affected me psychologically. I felt that I had emerged from this holocaust as a new man with a fearless personality. I do not now feel myself as the injured and embittered husband."



Murder in the Train

THE Agra-bound Kumaon Express roared as it went piercing through the sooty gloom that enveloped it. The head-light of the engine looked like the flaming eye of a Cyclops running in pursuit of a victim, the heave and the rattle of its mechanical limbs acting as a suitable accompaniment to the elemental fury. The passengers were glad of this "company" which might have proved irksome in other circumstances.

Two young men sat talking of the current world situation, the weather, the rising prices, the past — of the good old days (though neither of them was old enough to have seen them), of the future — of the tremendous advance of science, interplanetary travel and all that. At the moment, they were talking of the weather and condemning it.

"My God, what a night!" exclaimed one of them. "Fit enough for the hag to come out and brew their charms."

"You mean the witches? Do you believe in them?"

Shaking his head violently, as if trying to shake the very idea off his mind, the man who had mooted the subject said: "Not I. Of course, it is a particularly dark night. All sorts of accidents could happen to one out there on such a night," and he pointed a finger out of the window.

The train was moving along steadily, its panting in tune with the heartbeats of the night. And then the panting grew into a roar — a steady, discordant clamour. The train was crossing a bridge over the Ram-ganga.

"The monster is roaring."

"H'm." The other young man was beginning to doze off. Just then, an eldritch shriek rent the air and the would-be dozer woke up with a start. Another

shriek followed. The young man looked out to see what was up. What he saw was enough to evoke a scream of horror from him, too. For clinging to the handrails of the adjoining compartment was the form of a woman. And somebody was pushing her out into the river below.

The young man, who thus became a witness to the woman's being pushed out, stood speechless. His friend, too, was dumbfounded. To their great horror, they saw the woman's grip on the rails loosen, and then they heard her last ear-piercing shriek as she plunged into the abyss — into the swirling waters of the swollen river below.

The young men's senses returned some time later. Usually, one feels the full impact of an event only when it is all over, and these two men were no exception to the rule. With a face on which horror and surprise were writ large, the fellow who had first seen the woman clinging to the handrails now turned to the other passengers and proceeded to narrate vividly to them what he and his companion had seen. The people around heard him out with mouth agape. They could hardly believe their ears.

The train had by now crossed the bridge and its roar became a rhythmic rattle once again. Presently, it slowed down as it neared the wayside station of Makarandpur. It had hardly stopped when a group of passengers, led by the two young men, made a bee-line for the now closed compartment from which the woman had been thrown out. But their efforts and the guard's threats to get the door open proved of no avail. The guard then shouted at the top of his voice that he would have the door broken open if the persons inside did not heed his call. The threat worked. A few seconds later, two fellows, both of them little more than lads, came out of the compartment. They were perspiring profusely in spite of the cool weather. Without ceremony, the two young men accused the two occupants of the compartment of having thrown a

woman into the river, a charge which they promptly, even if a little incoherently, denied.

The crowd that had collected in front of the compartment began to grow furious. For their own safety, the two suspects were now taken into the Station Master's room, where a Government Railway Police constable began questioning them. They told him that no such thing as had been made out had ever taken place. This assertion seemed to be of doubtful veracity when, on a thorough search of the compartment in question, some pieces of a glass bangle were found by the constable.

Accordingly, the two suspects were taken into custody and handed over to the Government Railway Police at Badaun. When they were searched, two second class tickets (Nos. 2337 and 2338), valid from Bareilly to Badaun, were found on their person. The third class passengers joined together to make a written statement at the police station to the effect that they had seen a woman fall out from the compartment in question into the waters of the Ramganga below as the train was crossing the over-bridge.

Early next morning, the Superintendent of the Government Railway Police and Inspector Izaharul Hasan, along with the Station Officer, reached the spot where the woman was alleged to have been thrown into the river. They could not find there anything of significance.

The Inspector now put the whole case before the S.P. He told him that they had nothing to go on except the doubtful denials of the suspects, the eye-witness account of the two passengers and a few pieces of a glass bangle. The S.P. proposed that a search should be made for the woman or her body. But the odds were against such a search being fruitful, the Inspector pointed out. And, in the event, what he said proved to be quite true, for the divers and the mallahs could not, in spite of a concerted effort, succeed in locating the woman's body in the flooded river. The

S.P. at this stage also stressed the need for a knowledge of the motive of the crime. After a brief but thorough survey of the area, the police party returned to the Badaun Railway Police Station, where they started fresh interrogation of the men taken into custody.

The two suspects were jittery. Their wits had deserted them since the time they had been arraigned. Brought up before the S.P. and the other officers, they broke down.

"We are innocent, Sahib. Why then are we being harassed?" was all they could bring themselves to say, amidst loud sobbing, in reply to the searching questions put by the police officials. When the direct approach proved of no avail, the Inspector adopted an altogether different course to elicit the required information. He said: "Don't worry, boys. You seem to belong to a good family. Why should you be so apprehensive as to weep and wail over a thing which might, after all, be only a mistake? Just give me your correct names and addresses."

The two suspects again appealed for mercy and release. But the Inspector was not going to commit himself with any promises. He merely repeated what he had just said, adding: "Nothing is going to happen to you if you give us your real names and addresses. And, moreover, why should anything happen to you? God knows from which compartment the woman fell. Maybe those two fellows who made a written statement that they saw a woman being pushed out of the adjoining compartment were drunk and had a vision of a lady being thrown out. Or, it may even be that they have reported against you out of some spite.

The lads were prompt in falling for the eventualities the Inspector had so artfully suggested. They were now jumping from one pretence to another. The Inspector was no novice at this game. He immediately divined what the two fellows were about. He started leading them away from the unpleasantness of the situation, and thereby succeeded to a great extent in

relaxing their tension. After a few more assurances from him, one of the lads said: "My name is Amir Chandra Sharma and his Om Prakash."

"Where do you live and why have you come to Badaun?" the Inspector asked.

The young man who had just spoken replied: "We were coming to visit a relative here."

Asked in what locality the relative lived and what his name was, the two of them at first remained silent, but ultimately gave out the identity of the relative and the place where he lived. However, on enquiry, it was found that no such person lived in that locality.

The Inspector now grew a little stern. He told the two suspects plainly that, if they tried to escape by giving false replies to his question, they would only implicate themselves more deeply in the crime. After a trying interrogation in the course of which the S.P. chose to leave for his office, the suspects deposed that they were residents of Soron, in Etah district. The Inspector now discovered two facts — the suspects' names and addresses, and that they were raw hands at any sort of crime, for they tried to cover up their actions with a string of implausible lies.

Following their interrogation at the Badaun Railway Police Station, the two suspects were taken by the Inspector to Bareilly Railway Station for further enquiries. The Inspector learnt from the station master there that the same booking clerk who had been on duty on the evening in question was in the office just then. So they retraced their steps to the booking office.

The booking clerk peered suspiciously over his spectacles at the three men who had come into his room. He was probably one of those guys who would not trust anybody even with a pin. Then, recognising Om Prakash in the group, he took off his spectacles and addressed him: "Are you very much interested, young man in roaming around this railway station? I saw you here last evening, too."

But you went somewhere yesterday, didn't you?"

Here the Inspector took over before the old booking-clerk could say more. He asked: "Where did this young man go yesterday?"

Though the booking-clerk was not very fond of people who interrupted him when he was talking, he deigned to reply: "I can't say with certainty, but I think they must have gone to Badaun. I know only this much that I gave the man, now with you, three second class tickets for Badaun a long time before the Kumaon Express arrived." And, turning to Om Prakash, he said: "I think I said something to you, but you were in such a hurry." He made a deprecating gesture.

The Inspector put another question to the booking-clerk: "Please let me know the number of the tickets that you gave him."

The booking-clerk consulted a register and gave out the numbers as 2336, 2337 and 2338, adding: "These were the only second class tickets to be issued yesterday for the Kumaon Express."

The Inspector darted a look at Om Prakash, who seemed to have become virtually tongue-tied. He finally stammered: "What has that got to do with us?"

The Inspector looked at him sternly and said: "What have you done with the third ticket — ticket number 2336? And for whom did you buy it?"

"I purchased only two tickets," Om Prakash ventured

"No, you are telling a lie. The clerk says you bought three second class tickets for the Kumaon Express long before its arrival. And only three second class tickets were sold yesterday. It was you who purchased those tickets. Two tickets were found on your person. Where is the third?" The Inspector said this in a tone positive and firm enough to brook no denial.

The old clerk could not yet understand what all the pother was about. He simply looked on with apparent disgust as if sick of the whole business. He did not like to be disturbed by strangers when he was

in the booking office. But, as one of the persons present sported the uniform of the Government Railway Police, he discreetly chose not to voice his sentiments regarding their being in a place where they had no business to be.

However, when the Inspector told him that he was going to take the register into custody, the clerk became mildly curious. He asked what the boys had done, whether they were guilty of some sort of theft. For that was all he thought them capable of. Little did he know that the young men were suspected of perpetrating one of the most dastardly crimes — that of throwing a woman into a flooded river.

On enquiry at the suspect's home in Soron, the Inspector came to know that Amir Chandra was married to one Rambeti of Sisai, in Bareilly district, and that he was still prosecuting his studies in a college. His father informed the Inspector that Amir Chandra had been a spoilt child from his earliest years. If something caught his fancy, he would not rest until he had got it. So on his own he had gone to Hardwar and got himself admitted into a college there. As his financial position was not very good, Amir's father had refused to pay a sum of money demanded by his son when he had come home last time. This refusal had annoyed Amir Chandra very much and, after consultation with his bosom friend Om Prakash, he had gone to his father-in-law's place with his wife, taking his pal with him.

Hardwar, where Amir Chandra Sharma had been taking things easy before returning to his father's place, was the next port of call in the Inspector's itinerary. Investigations made there revealed that Amir Chandra Sharma had joined Panna Lal Bhalla College in July that year and lived at a dharmshala. He was described by his college mates as a fellow with a sentimental turn of mind who cared more for fun than studies. But they agreed that he was a good boy, giving them frequent treats at the local sweetmeat shop,

even though he was, more often than not, rather hard-pressed for money. He had often given full vent to his feelings of frustration among his friends who had, however, never taken him very seriously. They all agreed that there was not a lad in the college more free with his money than Amir Chandra. Another discovery that the Inspector made was a postcard written in red ink which was later discovered to be blood. Om Prakash had written this letter to his friend, Amir Chandra.

It had rained heavily for two or three days now and the village paths had become so many streamlets in which slime and mud flowed. The leaves were greener and dripping, and the sky at last clear of clouds save for a tiny patch or two which served to set off the clear blue canvas. The sun was peeping out and the outlook seemed brighter than in the past few days when a cart carrying the Inspector came to a halt at the door of Kalika Prasad, father of Rambeti, resident of Sisai. Kalika Prasad was a man of humble disposition and, putting on his meekest smile and manner, he now went forward to greet the august personage he saw coming out of the cart. He could not comprehend why the Inspector Sahib should have honoured him with a visit. The Inspector asked him whether he was Kalika Prasad and he said Yes. Kalika Prasad would have liked the Inspector to have breakfast with him, but the latter waved aside the invitation and immediately got down to brass tacks. He asked Kalika Prasad whether his daughter Rambeti was married to one Amir Chandra, of Soron, district Etah. Kalika Prasad replied in the affirmative.

In a few minutes, the Inspector had the full story with him. Kalika Prasad's daughter and son-in-law, along with Om Prakash, had come to his house from Soron. Here they had been received by Kalika Prasad and Babu Lal, his son. Rambeti had asked her father for Rs. 250 to meet the expenses which her husband was incurring in his studies. Kalika Prasad had expressed

his inability to give her such a large amount and had offered Rs. 45 instead. At this, Amir Chandra had flared up and called his wife names.

Kalika Prasad's voice trembled as he continued the narrative. When he had made it clear that he could give him only Rs. 45, Amir Chandra had asked, in rage: "How can Rs. 45 suffice for a whole term?" And Kalika Prasad had retorted: "Ask your father then for the money. It is none of my responsibility to bear these expenses." That had ended the argument as well as the visit.

The Inspector now knew for certain what the motive of the crime was. He asked Kalika Prasad only one question: "In which class did they usually travel?"

"Third class. They could not afford anything more."

The Inspector thus had a complete picture of the crime before him. Obviously, Amir Chandra had gone to his father-in-law's place with his wife and tried to get from the old man some money with which to meet the expenses he had incurred as a result of his stay at Hardwar. Unable to secure what he wanted, he had taken a desperate chance, to which his friend Om Prakash had apparently egged him on. With Om's help, he had succeeded in doing away with his wife. He had committed the crime with the motive of re-marrying and getting a handsome dowry that would enable him to lead a life of comfort.

The police proved the case against the two accused in the Sessions Court despite the fact that the body of the deceased had not been traced. The accused were found guilty of murder. Amir Chandra Sharma was sentenced to death, while his pal Om Prakash was awarded life imprisonment, the High Court upholding the judgment passed by the Sessions Court. The perpetrators of the cold-blooded murder thus got their just deserts.



Mystery of His Holiness

WHEN Inspector Chet Singh reached village Karam-pura in Agra District, the slanting rays of the afternoon sun outlined prominently the silhouette of sand hills on the banks of river Chambal. It was mid-summer and the landscape was dreary. Shrubs and grass were dry. The hillocks and ravines looked bare. Brownish, grey soil baked under the sun.

A report had been lodged at the Police Station by Lala Ram, goldsmith, that his cousin Sona Ram and Sona Ram's wife had not been seen in the village since the previous night. Perhaps, some criminals had kidnapped or murdered them. He requested for immediate police help to recover them.

"Did any person see them being kidnapped from their house," the Inspector enquired.

No, sir. The doors of his house are bolted and chained. We banged at the doors but they wouldn't open," Lala Ram replied.

"Take me to his house," the Inspector directed.

They reached the house which rose above the mud-houses nearby. It was a double-storeyed building made of bricks. There was no sound, no movement of any person inside the house. It stood like a mausoleum. All doors were bolted from inside. The Inspector banged at all the doors. Lala Ram shouted for Sona Ram, but none replied from inside the house. They all went round it. Neighbours could not tell if Sona Ram or his wife were attacked by criminals and the couple was taken away dead or alive. It was all so perplexing.

The Inspector decided to break open one of the doors. When the doors were broken open, the main sitting room showed nothing unusual. The thick cushion on the floor, the round pillows along the wall and

the desk in front of them indicated that Sona Ram had worked in this room at night. The pen-holder and the ink-pot, his *bahi khata* (accounts register) were all in their place. Nothing in the room appeared to have been disturbed.

He moved into the courtyard. No traces of a struggle of Sona Ram with criminals were found. A staircase to the upper portion was on one side along the courtyard wall. The Inspector climbed the steps. He observed on the roof a ghastly scene. Two dead bodies lay still on two charpoys (beds) covered with large patches of blood. The blood was now a thick blackish crust. It was clear that these two persons had been dead for some hours. Lala Ram recognised the dead bodies as those of Sona Ram and of his wife. Among many red-coloured half-prints one was prominent and complete near the bed of Sona Ram. The Inspector examined it carefully. It was the mark of the right foot which had, perhaps been smeared with blood. The big toe of the foot was distorted towards the outside of the foot.

Near the bed of Sona Ram's wife was kept a small pitcher of water. Close to it was a tumbler of glass. A similar pitcher with another glass tumbler was near the bed of her husband.

Chet Singh closely examined the scene of murder. The foot-prints led to the edge of the roof towards the outer wall, beyond which they could not be seen. Nothing in particular was found on the two earthen pitchers, on the glass tumblers, however, were some finger-print marks. He thought that Sona Ram and his wife had handled these tumblers to drink water during the night. He had the finger-prints developed and photographed. He also had all the foot-prints photographed. The two dead bodies were also photographed. He could not find any other tell-tale marks either on the roof or in the house or in the vicinity inspite of close observation and examination for long.

He, therefore, decided to conduct enquiries from

the persons. None could tell anything useful.

Turning to Lala Ram he questioned: "Lala Ram, tell me if your cousin had any men in his employ and if you suspect any one of them."

"None whom I suspect. But he had four men."

"How were they employed?"

"Two worked in the shop as goldsmiths, one at the house and one attended on him."

"As private attendant."

"More than that."

"Please call them. I'll talk to them. Who had been longest in his employ?"

"Gajraj Singh was his confidant. He had been brought up from childhood by his master."

"Where is Gajraj Singh? He should be able to say something."

"He is on leave. He slipped away when he should have been here. He is an ungrateful fellow."

"Did he go away on leave prior to murder or after? I would like to know that."

"That I don't know, sir. But he is an unreliable type."

"Where has he gone on leave?"

"To his village. That's what I am told."

"What is the name of his village? How far is it from here?"

The village of Nadgawan, at a distance of 5 miles, near river Chambal," replied Lala Ram.

The Inspector closed his eyes. Numerous wrinkles appeared on his forehead. He rested his neck on one side of the chair. His fore-finger and thumb of right hand moved as if they were tapping against each other.

By this time the other servant of Sona Ram, who was a youth of about fifteen years and lived not very far had arrived.

The Inspector half-opened his eyes and bade the servant to sit close to his chair.

"You appear to be a youth — simple and truthful

Now tell me, if you know anything about the murder of Sona Ram and his wife."

"No, sir. I only worked during day-time, and used to leave for my house at nightfall. The other servant, Gajraj, used to remain at the house for all the twenty-four hours," the youth replied.

"You must have come to the house of Sona Ram, for duty. You must have found the doors closed. Did you enquire from anybody, specially from Gajraj Singh, why the doors were closed?" questioned the Inspector.

"These days I was not on speaking terms with Gajraj, as Gajraj Singh is a cunning type and was a favourite of Sethji. He used to carry tales about me, and then Sethji would growl at me," he replied.

"Did you quarrel with Gajraj at any time?"

"Yes, about a week ago we exchanged hot words. When I threatened to catch Gajraj by the neck, he whipped out a long, sharp knife and I shuddered at its sight."

"So, Gajraj Singh used to carry a knife also."

"Yes Sir, he is a dangerous man. He carried this knife tied to a chain on his waist."

"Where has Gajraj been for the last two days?"

"Sir, he had been on leave for the last one week."

By this time the two servants, who worked as goldsmiths at the shop of Sona Ram, had arrived. The Inspector questioned them about the murder of Sona Ram but they could not give any useful information. They pleaded that they were employed to work at the goldsmith's shop. They did not know anything about the happenings at the house. They would arrive at the shop in the morning, work throughout the day, and leave for their houses in the evening. This schedule of work would continue even when their master remained out for his business.

Inspector Chet Singh continued the enquiry of this case, till late in the evening. As soon as the lengthening twilight shadows enveloped that house and the village, he decided to go to Nadgawan in search of

Gajraj Singh who, to his mind, might be in league with the criminals.

Nadgawan lay asleep enveloped in darkness on the high ridge of the bank of Chambal. The night was dark. Under the starry sky outlines of huts and houses looked as thick black lumps of darkness. The Inspector and his party stealthily approached the house of Gajraj Singh. The dogs barked at these men and there was a flutter in the cattleshed as the house of Gajraj was surrounded. Inspector Chet Singh tapped the door of the house. For sometime there was no response. Another bang at the door and the voice of a man inside was heard. He was apparently yawning.

"Who is it outside?"

"It is the Police. Will you open your doors?"

"What police? Whom do you want?"

"I wish to talk to you. Am I talking to Gajraj Singh?" Chet Singh said.

"Yes," came a reply.

The doors were opened. A hefty man appeared. The Inspector flashed the torch at him. He saw a long knife dangling from the waist of that man. Chet Singh stepped back a little and exclaimed, "Gajraj Singh, we would like to search your house."

"Search my house? It's amazing. Why? What is the matter?" The sturdy man questioned.

"You'll know, presently."

"Please tell me first, before you step in the house."

"You are the murderer of your master," shouted the Inspector.

"What do you say, sir, murderer of my master. I left him hale and hearty three days ago. Is he dead?" Gajraj Singh was perplexed.

"Tell me, did you leave Sona Ram, and his wife injured or dead."

"What do you mean? They were all alive. I swear."

"You don't tell the truth. You hide things. You are their murderer. Surrender that knife, the instru-

ment of their murder," barked Inspector Chet Singh at Gajraj Singh.

"I can't understand anything. This is a riddle to me. What? Is Sethji also dead?"

"Yes, yes. You butchered them all with this knife."

"Oh my God! This is terrible. What is this mystery and who is their murderer," moaned Gajraj Singh.

"We are here to solve the mystery and to apprehend the murderer." Saying this Inspector Chet Singh caught hold of the arm of Gajraj Singh. He was dazed, when his house-search was conducted by the Inspector and his staff and when his knife was snatched from him. Nothing useful was found in this house search. Next morning Gajraj Singh was marched on to the house of late Sona Ram. He almost collapsed, when he knew about the tragic end of his master, Sethji. He cried and wept.

"You now cry. Why did you murder our master and his wife? Why you slipped away quietly like a thief?" spoke the youthful servant who was there.

"You tell lies. You are my bitterest enemy," retorted Gajraj.

"I am your enemy and you were a confidant of the late master."

"I was not that mean as to murder my master and his wife."

"Stop all this nonsense, you fool", roared the Inspector.

"O God! save me from these falsehoods," cried Gajraj Singh and slumped on the ground in disgust.

Inspector Chet Singh compared the foot-prints of Gajraj Singh with the photograph of the blood-stained foot mark found near the spot, and had his fingerprints taken. Gajraj Singh's foot-prints did not tally. He pleaded ignorance of the whole affair. Even then the Inspector decided to interrogate him further, thinking that this old servant might give some new information.

Taking Gajraj Singh aside he spoke softly to him.

"You were the oldest and most faithful servant of the Late Sona Ram. Now, think as to who can be the person who committed this crime."

"Sir, I think some dacoits or robbers murdered my master and his wife and got away with the property," replied Gajraj Singh.

"In case dacoits had raided the house, there would have been an alarm and the neighbours would have been awakened. Nothing of this sort happened." Inspector Chet Singh continued to look with fixed gaze at Gajraj Singh.

Gajraj Singh did not react to this suggestion. He persisted that this crime was committed by some burglars, if not by dacoits.

"Sir, you are an able police officer and I am one of the rural folk. I have limited understanding," Gajraj Singh said.

"No, no, you are intelligent, Gajraj Singh. Now tell me, if you know of any person in this village or in the villages nearabout, who has a distorted toe on his right foot?" asked Inspector Chet Singh.

"This is a difficult question, sir, let me think." Gajraj pressed his head with both his palms.

"I couldn't tell you. My mind doesn't work."

The Inspector was silent. They talked of crops, of harvest, of bullocks, of their prices, of village feuds and litigation. These subjects were lively and refreshing to Gajraj. He was now a chatter box. When he finished, Chet Singh slid close to him and whispered, "I gather the late Sethji relied on you, confided in you."

"It is not easy to get close to one's master, Sir! One should have qualities of glittering gold. I was faithful to him and he confided in me. He had reverence for Sadhus. Sadhus flocked his house. He invoked their mercy. He sought their blessings for a son. But those saffron-clad sadhus were mortals like my master. They pretended to have renounced the world, but they wouldn't renounce delicious meals cooked by Sethaniji."

"Were they blessed with a son?"

"No, never. Those saints stayed here. Had nice time, and left to befool others."

"You are a wise person who speak the truth without fear. I like you, Gajraj."

Gajraj lifted his fallen thick moustaches with his right thumb and fingers. But as he spoke they fell again across his upper thick lip. "I can speak on so many topics, Inspector Sahab, that you wouldn't like to leave me alone. I talk to you freely, though you searchd my house. I don't mind that."

"Please forget that. I like you." Chet Singh came still closer and spoke to him in low voice, "Sethji liked saints and sadhus, but what about Sethaniji? What were her likes and dislikes?"

"She is in the other world with my master. What may I say of her? The less, said the better."

"Go on Gajraj. Each one of us will go to the other world some day. Don't hesitate. You are known to be truthful."

"That I am, please listen to me." He continued and smiled. "She was ten years junior to Sethji. She was full of vigour. Loved music and dance. Was charming and slim. Was liberal in habits."

"Liberal in habits. I couldn't catch its meaning?"

"Liberal? Oh you ask its meaning, sir. It means liberal in love." The smile got into a grin. His whole face was expressive. "She would keep gay and smiling when the guests were here."

"Even if pious Sadhus were here."

"Who is pious in this world, sir? Haven't you heard the story of Menka? How she charmed the hermit and got a child," spoke Gajraj.

"But Sethaniji didn't get a child."

"Her ill luck and that of my master. A child is not born of the charm of a lady. Luck also matters. God willed it otherwise. Now both are resting in peace. That was His will. What is a man? A skeleton of bones, flesh and skin. The spirit flees, charm vanishes, beauty fades. This is the will of God, sir,"

Gajraj philosophised.

"You are a wise person Gajraj, you appear to be religious and pious."

"That I am," he tried to lift his moustaches up.

"Please be truthful about what happens here, on this sordid earth. I mean, of Sethaniji's friendship with any Sadhu or any person." The Inspector spoke softly.

"Yes, sir, one friend was Sunder, a robust, handsome rich farmer who owns a number of fields in a village far away. He often came to Sethji's shop, had gold and silver ornaments made. Once he got late. By the time he settled about the ornaments at the shop, black clouds gathered in the sky. Evening became dark as night. Sethji was kind. He asked him to stay for the night in one room. Sethaniji served him good food. God only knows, what happened in that night. From next morning the lady got friendly with him, asked him for meals whenever he came, requested him to stay for the nights. That mule obeyed mutely," Gajraj grinned.

"In what village does Sunder live?"

"In the village of Namkura, six miles away."

"When did he come here last?"

"Only a week ago, sir."

"Did any of the servant of Sethaniji or you carry or bring messages or letters from Sunder to her?"

"I am not aware sir. I won't do these mean things."

Inspector Chet Singh sat silent. He decided that he might meet Sunder and talk to him. So far it had been a blind alley in which he had been groping. This crime was dastardly -- murder of two persons not in a forest or wilderness but in a village with habitation. None among the villagers would come forward to tell him anything. They would come, bemoan the death of Sethji and his wife and walk away. This crime was committed, perhaps, during the night. He was constructing and reconstructing his theories. A long vista of wilderness had begun to stretch in his mind. He felt like a lone farer in that vastness. He

was trudging an un-guided path un-aided.

Gajraj was surprised at this silence. He spoke. "Inspector Saheb, you are tired. I'll get some thing to eat and cold water to drink."

"No, no. You may please go and take rest. I'll get you again."

Chet Singh cut short.

"How may I leave you? You are our guest. I must look after you. My Guru tells me 'when a person gets tired, his temper gets fidgety. At such moments he should wash his face and hands with cold water,' the talkative Gajraj continued.

Chet Singh relaxed, "Who is your Guru?"

"He is a recluse, a wanderer, but likes to be on the banks of the Chambal river. He lives away from din and bustle. He loves quiet spots. You should meet him, have his darshan. I'll find out for you, if he would be in his abode for the next three or four days. His abode is about fifteen miles from here." Gajraj talked freely.

"No, thanks. Not now. I'll meet him some other day."

"I tell you, all your worries will be over, sir. Your life will sail like a boat on the seas of the world smoothly. You should meet pious persons." Gajraj was, perhaps, repeating some words of his Guru.

The Sub-Inspector came to Chet Singh and informed that the dead bodies had been photographed, their inquest reports giving the list of injuries and nature of injuries and probable cause of injuries was ready. Other documents connected with these suspected murders had been prepared. He awaited instructions for sending the bodies for autopsy. "Please take the finger-impressions of the dead bodies and then send them for autopsy," Chet Singh instructed.

Evening had drawn into sunset. The slanting crimson rays bathed the mud houses in saffron hue. The birds flew to their nests. Men came back home from fields with long strides.

Inspector Chet Singh was on a horseback on way to Namkura. Gajraj Singh rode a smaller pony of the late Sethji. Other policemen walked. They hardly talked to one another. The country side was noiseless. Light was fading. By the time the party reached village Namkura night had set in. Stars twinkled. A thin rim of moon glimmered through the darkness of night. Outside the houses hardly any activity was noticeable. Gajraj took his pony forward to lead the way to Sunder's house. The door was closed. On tapping it, it was opened.

Chet Singh enquired about Sunder of the man who opened the doors. He gave out his name as Somu, younger brother of Sunder. Sunder had gone away to his friend's house in another village.

"Please tell us the name of that village."

"The village is Rampura, but what brings you here? Somu enquired.

"Nothing particular. I wished to speak to Sunder on a certain matter," Chet Singh replied.

Somu requested them to come down their horses and have something to eat which he had cooked. This again aroused the Inspector's curiosity.

"Why have *you* cooked? Have the ladies of the house also gone away?" he asked.

"No, this is a bachelor's home. I cook, look after the house and till the fields. My brother spends time with that friend who is a vagabond. I don't like him." Somu was candid.

"Who is this friend? What is his means of livelihood."

"He is a prosperous man. He is Haria, owner of many fields and full of deceit."

"Why does your brother keep company of such a man?"

"He is elder to me. How may I help it?" Somu lamented that Haria was ruining his brother.

They talked while they had meals together. Chet Singh and Gajraj thereafter rode out of the village.

The journey to village Rampura was long and tiring. When they reached in the morning most of the men had moved out to work. They were guided to Haria's house by a boy. Haria met them at his door. He enquired of them the purpose of their visit to his house. On telling him of his intention to meet Sunder, Chet Singh dismounted. Sunder who was inside the house appeared clad in a neat Kurta and Dhoti. He was a tall, handsome, clean-shaven man with dark curly hair.

The Inspector desired to let him and Sunder talk in a separate room. Both of them sat in a small room facing each other.

"Sunder, you are a well-to-do agriculturist of your village."

"Yes, sir. My father left this property for us."

"To enjoy and to merrily exist," Chet Singh added.

The young man was quiet.

"That is what people talk of you."

"Villagers are rumour-mongers. They are vicious."

"That may be, but you are known in village Karam-pura."

"What is the harm. I go there to have ornaments."

"Ornaments for whom?"

"For my family."

"Or for Sona Ram's wife." Chet Singh spoke and a mischievous smile spread across his face. Sunder faintly denied this and was quiet again. He was in fact, taken aback. He fixed his eyes on the ground.

"Please look up. I give you a bit of a news. Your lady is no more. She and her husband are resting in the other world."

"What do you mean? Be clear, sir."

"Sona Ram and his wife are dead." Chet Singh decided to give him a shock.

"Dead? Sethani is dead? Oh God! When did it happen? I can't believe it."

"Two nights ago. Both were murdered. I won't lie to you, Sunder, though you may hide many secrets

from me."

"Murdered ! murdered ! murdered !" He repeated. He couldn't utter a word further. His legs trembled. A shiver crept in his young limbs. He began to tremble and staggered into another room.

He thought Sunder was a wavering, sentimental young man. The death of his lady-love bewildered and un-nerved him. Either it was his intense disappointment or his involvement in crime that caused this trouble. This was a moment to elicit more information. Chet Singh called Sunder who sent words that he was unwell and the Inspector may come to his room. In the room Sunder lay in his bed. The shiver of his body had subsided. He covered his body with a sheet.

"Sir, I had an attack. I had to come away." His lips quivered.

You need rest. Be calm," Chet Singh spoke softly. "Please listen to what I say. You are a promising young man. You should look after your property, your household. Don't waste your time," Chet Singh advised.

"Sir, you are my elder. My guide in my affliction." He extended his hand. The Inspector held it warmly. He spoke: "Thoughts of that lady should not afflict you. She was another man's wife. Seek a good girl and marry her. Lead a settled life and be happy. Care for things that are real. Don't run after smoke which is fleeting and transitory."

"You talk of smoke. Smoke will rise from her pyre. Her delicate body which was in my arms not once but numberless times will be consumed by leaping fire. Those hard pieces of wood will consume her. No, no, it can't be. I'll stop that to happen. That cruel act shall not be enacted. I'll go, I'll go to Karam-pura. My heart is burning. My soul is restless," he murmured. Sat up in his bed, stood up bare-footed on the floor. The summer heat was getting into the building through windows and doors. The atmos-

phere in the room was charged and tense.

Chet Singh held Sunder by the arm and spoke softly, "Don't be a fool. It's none of your business to go there, you have to stay here. Unload your heart's burden to me. It'll relieve you."

Sunder was silent. He sat again and then stretched his legs on the bed. He threw the sheet aside. In a low tone he narrated the tale of his romance with Sethani of Karampura. That fat, short and plumpy Sona Ram could not keep in step in life with his wife, the vivacious, nimble-footed, slim, pleasure-loving lady. His sole aim in life was to swindle his customers of gold from the ornament he made for them, to amass riches, to adorn his wife with weighty ornaments, eat good food and sleep like a puny giant, snoring throughout. Even cannon-fire won't awake that lazy creature. To hide his sins he built up a facade round him of unreal devotion to God and sadhus. In the evenings he would at times send for holy men to recite passages from religious books and sing devotional songs. These induced him to sleep and snore. All sorts of saints and hermits came, old and bearded, middle-aged, young and clean shaven. Some clad in saffron, some in white garments. The young lady had to cook food for them. She didn't evince much interest in them. During the day when Sona Ram was at his shop she would collect girls and ladies of the village at her house. They had dance and music parties. They danced and sang mirthfully. In rainy season they would go to groves of trees out of the village. They would put thick ropes on strong branches of sturdy trees as swings. They would swing and sing.

"I wished to swing merrily throughout life — supported on a sturdy branch, but they tied my fate to a thick trunk," only once did she confide in me. Sunder choked with emotion as he uttered these words. After a pause he continued, "Had I met her prior to her marriage she would have surely taken me. I was the man for her." He closed his eyes and did not

speak for long.

The Inspector spoke words of advice to him again. He consoled him by saying that the Sethani, who was dead now, had not really given out her mind to Sunder. Ladies were fickle minded, unsteady, and emotional. They were not to be taken for their words, literally. Sunder was behaving like a foolish young man. He should reveal the full facts to the Inspector.

The young man opened his lips when many assurances and promises were given to him by the Inspector. In his subsequent narrative he described fully how he stealthily visited Sethani whenever he could get a chance. Her husband evidently was not aware of these visits. He was once brought to the house by Sona Ram as he had got late at the shop in giving details of the ornaments for which he placed orders. The evening was cold. He stayed for the night in their house. He had dinner where delicious dishes were served. Thereafter he lay on the thick broad cushion in the room. He lowered the wick of the lamp. Then a woman wrapped in a silk sari appeared with a glow of light. He woke up dazed in torch light. He beheld the face of a lady. It was ravishing. She whispered, "Aren't you asleep? Are you comfortable? Do you need anything please?" I felt my blood rushing fast in the veins, my finger ends tingled. I fumbled for words to thank her. She helped me by saying, "You are my guest. I should look after you," and then she smiled. Her well-set white teeth glistened even in the dim light. Her eyes were large and expressive. I was captivated. She withdrew from the room.

She was gone but my mind was roving. I couldn't sleep that night. Was it a reality or a dream? I cherished that dream. That was first meeting with her. Since after that night my visits to the village were frequent. I regularly stayed at that house. She would invariably come to me every night. We talked for long. Once I gave a modest present of a gold ring to her. I insisted to put it on her finger, held her hand. I

felt the warmth, held it for long and she gave a bewitching smile. From that night I decided that she was my lady, my love. I loaded her with presents in my subsequent visits. I felt nearer to her, and she came closer to me. One winter night, in that room, I drew her to my bosom. She like a soft supple creeper twined round me. Oh! she was my essence of life. She was my everything. I must go and meet her. Just now. I am going. I am going," he raved. He suddenly stood up from his bed again.

Chet Singh put him down with all his strength and shouted, "You can't go. You are sick. She is dead."

"Dead? Who says? I'll catch her." He struggled to go. "Who are you to stop me? I must go."

"I order, you can't go. Don't you know I am the Police Inspector. You have to reply to my question first. Don't be silly, young man. She is dead, you can't catch her."

Sunder sat down on the bed, kept quiet for a while and then stammered: "One more man had stood in my way. But I couldn't leave that lady," he heaved a sigh.

"Who was that? Please tell me, Sunder. I am your well-wisher. I don't want that good young man like you should go astray in life."

Sunder kept mum for long. At last he mumbled, "that Sadhu had come to foretell me that if I would persist to meet her, bad consequences would follow. Now I see that police is between me and her."

After long questioning by the Inspector, Sunder could be brought round to tell the particulars of the Sadhu who had advised him not to visit Sethani, not once but, several times. He had threatened Sunder with dire consequences if he persisted in these visits.

Early next morning the Inspector and Gajraj

Singh rode to Karampura. He mostly listened to Gajraj's chatter about fields, crops, cattle, men, women, village gossip and scandals. He thought more of the enquiry in which he had little headway. Both were quiet for a while.

"Sir, this Sunder was a murderer of my master and Sethaniji," Gajraj broke the silence.

"How do you say that?" Chet Singh questioned.

"He stayed at my master's house regularly. Ate good food. He is a man with no character and full of tricks. Who knows one's friend may turn out to be one's worst enemy. The times are bad."

"What is the basis of your conclusion?"

"I don't have conclusions, sir. I only guess. My guesses are always right. My master would often say that I was a wise person. My guess was true. I would guess about the rains, about the prices of grain, gold and silver," he bragged.

"You are an oracle."

"That's why my master would consult me. I remained steadfast with him like a shadow," Gajraj boasted.

"Please take me for my word. Shut Sunder in Havalat. I hate him."

"That's no ground."

"Did you see him, sir? He is now pale like a sick man. Where will he get nice meals to eat? Had he not eaten, those dishes would have been served to me. My master was so kind. He is dead and his wife is dead. Sunder is crooked. His each limb is crooked."

"I didn't notice any crooked parts in his body. His legs are not crooked, his feet are not crooked, his hands are not crooked, his body is not crooked. He appears to be as much sorry for the dead persons as, perhaps, you are." Chet Singh contradicted.

"You are apt to get mistaken. I bet, sir, that the rascal's mind is crooked. Please don't shield that man. I plead you. I hate him."

He heard the words of Gajraj most of the way. The sun had gone up in the sky. It was getting hot. Sweat appeared on the necks of horses. Morning breeze turned into gusts of wind.

At Karampura Chet Singh continued his enquiry. He talked to a number of people who told him vaguely about the Sadhu who mostly spoke kindly to them but at times even foretold of the unpleasant events that were to happen in the man's life. He often visited this village and other villages nearby. His reading of palms of persons was, perhaps, due to deep study and meditation, prophetically accurate.

"Our Guruji or Sadhuji is bestowed with supernatural powers. Kali Mai has been kind to him. Even in his youth he had a sparkle of God in him," spoke a young lady as she placed the pitcher of water near the well.

"Why don't you tell the officer that he studied the lines in your palm and foretold that you will get a son and lo! a chubby son was born. He is our Lord Krishan. We are fond of him and he likes all of us," added another lady.

"Do the menfolk also respect him?" Chet Singh asked.

"Why not? He is a venerated figure in the village. Even the mischievous and wicked men are afraid of him," the second lady replied. She was more talkative.

"Who are the wicked men of the village in your opinion." Chet Singh was anxious to know from them.

"The biggest wicked man rode by your side as you came to our village."

"Who Gajraj?"

She nodded. She smiled and remarked: "Gajraj tries to get near everybody who is big. He was a favourite of the late Sethji. He designed to eat all the good food cooked by our friend Sethani — poor little thing. She was so kind to us."

"But Gajraj tells me that he guards the shop of the late Sethji at night."

"It is all wrong. His aim in life is to feed himself at other man's cost and sleep when he should be watching the shop."

"But he says he is devoted to God. He has a Guruji."

"Devoted to God, Ha....Ha....He is a liar. He pretends to be a devotee of our Guruji. He can never be religious," she giggled.

"Now tell me, ladies, during the night that Sona Ram and his wife were murdered where do you think Gajraj Singh had been."

"He had run away on leave, so people say. He can't face a murderer or a dacoit. Our Sethaniji would tell us that he didn't work at the house, but stayed at the shop. At the time of meals he was there with hungry looks. He was fed by her. She was kind. He, a mean fellow, didn't like the guests at the house. He didn't like us and other ladies who assembled at our late friend's parties. He thought we'll eat all the food. He wished to devour those dishes. Our benefactor, the late Sethani didn't like him. Her husband was fond of him."

In the far distant darkness crept engulfing the twilight. The Inspector left the village and rode. He was lone traveller, downcast and disconsolate. The path on which his horse tread led mostly near the bank of river Chambal. He rode the whole night to reach the base of the high hillock. The horse climbed it fast. On the top of the hillock, was a flat piece of ground. At the edge of this plain on the side facing the river, the flat land fell. He walked some distance down, reaching a spot between two projecting wall-like arms of the hillock, to the entrance of the cave. The piece of land in front of the cave was level. A large Banyan tree stood there.

Opening the thatch-like frame of dry grass and thorny twigs, which was the door of the cave, he entered it flashing his torch. None was inside the cave. He came out and slowly walked down to the banks.

At the bank he accosted a boatman. The boatman did not know the whereabouts of the Sadhu. He vaguely said that the pious man might have gone to the village of Garhi Chakpura. Another person came out with the information that he had seen the Sadhu entering that village.

Chet Singh decided to go to Garhi Chakpura which was at a distance of five miles. When he reached there he met some persons who sat in a group. Stopping near them he enquired if the Sadhu was in the village. He wished to pay homage to him.

"At this late hour he would be in meditation or may be sleeping. Where from do you come?" One of them asked.

"From a long way. I have to meet him. Where is he?"

"For him the rich and the poor are all alike. He blesses all," turning to the other man he continued.

"Our Sadhuji attracts people from far. He has qualities. See, this horseman comes from a long distance to have his darshan," as one of them spoke, all nodded in assent.

"You are also his devotee?" Chet Singh also nodded.

"You, young man, take him to the house of the Ahir woman. He may be there or he may have gone. I am not sure." An elderly man in the group directed a young man.

The young man stood up, took his lathi and walked with Chet Singh.

"Who is this Ahir woman?" Chet Singh asked when they had gone some distance.

"A young widow. Her house is at the other end of the village. She is devoted to Sadhuji."

"What does she do?"

"She rears cows. Supplies milk. Sells ghee. Owns some fields. She is well-to-do."

"She should be religious, God-fearing."

"I don't know that, she is ill-tempered, nasty."

"She lives all by herself so far — a brave pious lady," Chet Singh said.

The young man laughed and added, "You'll see for yourself. Mere physical company of Sadhuji means nothing. She should be modest and good-natured, not haughty and aggressive."

"She is a widow, you should know."

"She smiles and laughs with those whom she likes. She goes alone to Sadhuji's abode miles away at midnight. If I were to speak to her she would growl at me and I'll brandish my lathi. She is afraid of me," the young man held up his lathi.

"You appear to be prejudiced."

"I don't like her. I'll point at her house to you and will go. You deal with her alone."

As they reached the house, that youth left. Chet Singh knocked at the door. He had to knock a number of times before the door opened. A woman peeped holding a hurricane lamp.

"What do you want at this hour?" She asked.

"I am a traveller."

"This is not a place for travellers. Go to the village headman and stay there."

"I am told Sadhuji is here."

"How does that matter?"

"I wish to see him. I am his follower."

"What is your name and from what village do you come? This is no time for any one to meet Sadhuji. You wouldn't let him rest, a strange follower." She was stern.

Chet Singh gave out false names. He knew the names of villages which were far distant from here. He gave the name of one of such villages fearing all the time that if this lady were to know many people there the cat may be out of the bag. He said, "I am a traveller from far, I had to ride all the way, am tired. Have come to this house for meeting the holy man."

"Please tie your pony near the cow's shed there. Then come in, have food." She suddenly was kind.

Chet Singh observed the house closely. Portions of it were built in brick and the rest in mud. He had been told to stay in the room near the main door. A bed was put for him in the open, not far from his horse. As the lady brought his meals she put the wick of the lamp up. In that light he saw her in colourful clothes, decked with ornaments. She looked pretty. Placing the *thali* she spoke kindly, "This is the *prasad* of Sadhuji. You are lucky to have it."

"Yes, lady, I am lucky. You are so kind." She smiled and left saying that after dinner, he could sleep on the bed comfortably. She would close the doors of the house soon.

Chet Singh woke up early in the morning. He walked round the house stealthily. He saw a door of a room at the back portion of the house. The Sadhu was staying in this room. A broad sheet of water had run out of this door spreading on the ground and making it wet. Perhaps, the room had been washed and water swept out of this door. As he walked near this wet patch he saw two foot impressions. He looked at them carefully; one of the foot impressions was of normal feet. The other had an abnormality. The big toe of the right foot impression appeared distorted towards the outside of the foot. He came closer and fixed his eyes at it. He decided to photograph it, ran to his bed and brought the camera. He focussed it at the foot impressions and clicked it, took photographs from different angles, fearing all the time that the door might open any moment or some villager might appear there, see him and put all sort of questions to him. He thought that some one had walked out of this room. He followed those foot-marks to some distance beyond which they spread out on the dust. It was difficult to discern them. He photographed those foot-marks which were discernible.

By day-break herd of cattle moved towards the grazing grounds. His horse and a pair of bullocks were the only animals left in the shed. He wished to

go. As she opened the door and appeared, he looked at her. She wore the less striking garments of the village women. Her hair were dishevelled.

"I'll go now. I have to go far," Chet Singh spoke.

"Have some fresh milk before you go." She was less cheerful than the previous night.

"Could I meet Sadhuji before I leave."

"He is not here. He has left."

"When?"

"In the early hours of the morning."

"It's my bad luck. Where has he gone? To his abode or to another village."

"I couldn't tell you that. Sadhus move at their will."

"I thank you. You have been so kind to me." She smiled, moved briskly, brought milk and sweets for him.

He rode out of the village. His mind was puzzled.

Chet Singh put his horse to a trot. He wished to reach the abode of the Sadhu quickly. The sun rays were warm. The path was desolate. His goal eluded him. A sense of despair descended on him. He moved on. Each cluster of thorny bush that he left behind seemed to prick. His memories of days gone by seemed to unfold the failures and successes in life. He tried to balance them. The scale tilted towards success. He had trudged life's path with earnestness and hard work. He had lingered long in that village after leaving the Ahir woman's house.

He had observed the legs and feet of the villagers who walked to fields or followed the cattle. He had stopped to talk to those who sat in front of their huts. He had at times peered at their feet. None of them had a distorted toe. He half-closed his eyes. Shadows of the two foot-prints of the wet soil close to the back door of that house were clear. They grew larger. The outlines became blurred. They began to disappear.

The reins he held were loose. He spurred the pony. It trotted again.

When he reached the cave abode, the Sadhu was not there. He searched for him but could not find. Enquiries from villagers led to no useful information. He spent the whole day and lay in wait until late night. That pious personality did not return.

Next morning early Chet Singh left for the Police Station. He conferred there with those who worked with him. Each piece of information was examined and rejected if it led nowhere. Personality of each person who, had come across, was analysed and discussed.

One of the young Policemen said, "Inspector Saheb, all alleys in this case are blind. All efforts have failed. Let us go to sooth-sayers and palmists. They at times tell of the past and of the future."

"What do you mean?" growled the Inspector.

"Sir, the Sadhu is respected for telling the fate by looking at the palm of persons. Let us all go to him and find from him what is in fate for us — failure or success in this case."

All of them laughed.

The Inspector left next day. This time two policemen were with him. They intended to be out of the Police Station for a few days. He hung his camera on the shoulder and put in his pocket snaps of the objects he had photographed in this case.

He intended to meet the Sadhu, not for the purpose suggested by the young policeman, but to talk to him. This party arrived at the village in late afternoon. All ascended the hillock. Chet Singh told the two policemen to wait for him while he moved to the abode of the hermit. He lifted the thatch door. Beams of light from the door brightened the face of the Sadhu who appeared to be in meditation. He sat on a deer skin, facing a statue of Goddess Kali. The floor of the

cave was level. On a slightly raised long platform of mud along one wall of the cave was a thick straw mat. An earthen lamp was in front of the statue.

As Chet Singh sat close to him, the Sadhu opened his eyes and spoke: "Had you to wait for long?"

"No, not for long, Sadhlaji." I tried to meet you in the village Garhi Chakpura. I couldn't have your darshan," replied Chet Singh.

"Oh! you are my disciple who came from a long distance. Kali Mai (Mother Kali) will shower mercy on you." He put his palm on the head of Chet Singh.

"I am in darkness, I wish to see the light, the light of wisdom," Chet Singh said.

"I'll show the light. See the light entering here from that door. When the recesses of darkness in your mind are lit by knowledge and devotion, you'll behold fruits of virtue, a halo round your God and your preceptor like me."

Chet Singh was silent. He saw the clean shaven face of the Sadhu clearly in the rays of light from the cave door.

"You, perhaps, can't understand the meaning of my words. My abode is dark. The spark within me is ignited. I have the strength to peer through darkness. I can fathom the feeling of human hearts," the Sadhu boasted.

"Yes, this place is dark and stuffy. I wish to breathe free air. Could we come out?" Chet Singh suggested.

"Yes, why not, you seek physical comforts, you wish to see superficial light. Come out. Follow me." His words were patronising.

They came out of the cave on to a mud platform round the Banyan tree near the door of the cave. The Sadhu sat cross-legged, his right foot jutting slightly above the thigh of the left leg, while the left leg was over the right thigh. Under the drooping branches he lectured on renunciation, on salvation, on crusading against evil. He perhaps aped the Buddha who attained enlightenment under a tree.

Chet Singh fixed his eyes on his right foot and the toe. The toe was distorted towards the outer side of the foot. He had observed the foot-prints of the Sadhu on the soil outside the door of the cave as he came out. They were similar to those found at the back of the Ahir woman's house near the back door. The Inspector got up pretending to quench his thirst from the water of the well at a distance.

"I don't like my disciples leaving like this. They should control their senses." The Sadhu remonstrated.

"I'll be back soon."

Chet Singh walked briskly to the well on one side of the cave. He examined the photographs of blood-stained foot-marks on Sona Ram's roof. They looked similar to the photograph of foot-prints at the back door of Ahir woman's house. There was similarity to impressions of the right foot with its distorted toe, of the Sadhu. He beckoned the constables. They came. The party stealthily approached the banyan tree. On reaching close they pounced on the Sadhu and held him. Some villagers who were passing that way saw their Sadhu being troubled by the policemen. They came nearer "What is all this you are doing to me. I am a pious man," the Sadhu muttered.

"We know how pious you are! Come along we'll search your cave." Inspector Chet Singh spoke sternly.

"You are my disciple. Heavens will fall on you if you search this cave. It is not my abode only. Goddess Kali lives in it."

"Don't be a fool, you pretender. You are murderer," roared the Inspector.

"I didn't know that you were a Police Officer. I wish to talk to you alone. Will you insult me in the presence of all these people? My image will be shattered. Please be kind enough," he beseeched.

"I'll agree if you tell me something useful, something truthful," the Inspector replied.

The Sadhu came out with vague statements about his frequent visits to Seth Sona Ram's house and village

Karampura, of his consideration for the Ahir widow who was more devoted to him and of Sunder's involvement with the Seth's wife who had swerved from the path of righteousness. He kept himself out of the crime of that double murder.

Chet Singh was not satisfied. The search of the Sadhu's cave was conducted by him. In one corner lay an earthen chilam and a tin full of Sulfa. At another place near the low platform was placed a Kamandal (a wooden vessel with handle) full of water. When the Kamandal was removed the soil below appeared softer. It was dug. A big size *Bhujali* with sharp edges was recovered. It was taken in possession. The Sadhu was hand-cuffed and marched to the Police Station.

During interrogation, when he was confronted with photographs of the foot-prints and when his finger-prints were taken, a sense of nervousness overcame him. He was timid. He revealed that he was fond of pretty women. He had renounced his home not to wander about aimlessly but to have pleasures of this world. He read some books on palmistry and that helped him to hold the delicate hands of pretty girls. He used to visit village Karampura as the young women folk liked him and they charmed him. He desired to possess the lady that he liked. That was his nature and he could not help it.

Recounting the reason for the murder of Sona Ram and his wife, he gave out that once the Sethani came to his abode all the way from village Karampura. She requested him to study her palm and tell her when a son would be born to her. "I held her palm for long in my hands. It was warm and fresh. We were alone in the cave. I put my rough, strong hands round her delicate arms. She resisted. I desired to draw her in my arms as her beauty was irresistible. She was elusive. She freed her arm from my hands, screwed her eyes and scolded me saying that I was a wretch, a villain in the garb of a Sadhu. I couldn't bear

that insult. Women had always touched my feet and she had the courage to utter harsh words to me. I was enraged. I cursed her that she would never get a child. She went out of the cave never to come there again."

He then praised the devotion of the Ahir widow of village Garhi Chakpura to him. This woman had completely given herself up to him. He liked her as she was also pretty and didn't allow any other man to visit her except him.

The Sadhu requested for some water. He drank it and refreshed his tongue and throat. He continued that when he heard of the regular visits of Sunder to village Karampura and to Sona Ram's wife, he was sore. When he further realised that this woman had given in to Sunder he lost his temper completely. He thought that the affair was within Sona Ram's knowledge. He was a man with no scruples. He might have connived at all this. "She had evaded me, insulted me and fallen into the arms of another man. I was in rage. She was an unholy creature, she was not fit to exist in this world and pollute it. I am a devotee of Mother Kali. My Goddess had also killed the demon. I must also do that. I must follow Her mission. I must avenge my insult. I must finish off that sordid Sona Ram and his wicked wife with the same weapon which Kali Mai handled. I took the *Bhujali* which was my *Khadga* and hid it in my saffron robes."

Inspector Chet Singh questioned, "Now tell me, how you committed the double murder? You appear to be truthful."

"I won't tell you lies. I am not made of that stuff. I fear nothing in the world. The gallows are in sight and I must ascend them smiling."

"That dark night when I reached the Seth's house, all was quiet. There was no soul awake nearby. I climbed the roof taking support of windows, ventilators and projecting bricks in the wall. It was a dangerous climb, but I was on a mission."

"On the roof I found them fast asleep. I butchered

them with my sharp *Bhujali*. I slashed the neck of Sona Ram. He couldn't move or moan. Fresh blood oozed from his throat. The sight of that blood made me bloodthirsty. I pierced the sharp weapon into the heart of that wicked woman. A fountain of blood gushed through her breast. I put them to eternal sleep. I was thirsty. I drank water from a glass near the pitcher. Thereafter, I quickly came down and walked away fast from that village. The revenge had to be taken. Kali Mai ordained so."

The Sadhu tightly closed his lips. In his eyes blood was rising and they were ruddy. The small hair on his head stood on their ends. When the result of comparison of finger-prints on the glass with those of the Sadhu was received, it was proved that they were of the same person. Traces of human blood were still found on the *Bhujali* of the Sadhu. He gave the same statement to a magistrate when his statement was recorded.

He only added: "I am out of the cave and my *Bhujali* is out of its cave. My spirit is now ready to mingle with the eternal spirit."



House of Magnet

THE morning was cold and breezy. All the doors and windows of the room were closed. In the room, Detective Inspector Hari Singh was busy at his table, in the hazy light that glimmered against the mist-laden window-panes. A strong gale lashed the doors, making them quiver and creak.

An insistent rapping noise at the door brought the Inspector up with a start. But Hari Singh, who was poring over some files and charts on the table, thought it to be the storm spending itself on his doorstep.

"Tap...Tap...Tap", came another knock at the door. Who could it be at such an early hour? Hari Singh asked himself. He stretched his legs under the table and, with a sudden jerk, got up and went and opened the door.

A plump figure stumbled into the room, gasping for breath and not able to utter a word for some time. Muffled in a thick woollen wrapper, his head and face all looked to be one piece. The rotund greasy cheeks protruded from the wrapper and the thick black moustaches were half-hidden.

"Who are you?" asked Hari Singh.

"Ah...a man in affliction, tired and ruined!" came the reply. The stranger opened his eyes and again gasped for breath.

"What is your affliction?" enquired Hari Singh.

"Please help me. I am thoroughly upset. They have robbed me. They are a set of scoundrels." The flabby man broke down, his red eyes moist with tears.

"Don't get agitated. Tell me all about your troubles."

"See my pockets; I'm penniless; I'm completely broke," he replied and with his tongue licked his par-

ched lips. A lump seemed to mount inside his throat. He stopped short and, with a deep sigh, began: "In that house, there was an assembly of cheats and sharpers. They made me gamble. At first, the stakes were not very high and I won. Later, the stakes were raised, and with it rose the tempo of my losses. When I was penniless, they pushed me out into the street and slammed the door in my face. How ruthless they were!"

"At which place did you gamble last night?" the Inspector asked, in an attempt to get down to brass tacks.

"In a pucca house inside a dark lane in Pir Bazar. A betel-seller's shop, with a large mirror and two red pictures, is at the corner of that lane. I bought some betels there." The stranger tried to twirl his fallen moustaches, removed the wrapper from his head and adjusted his black cap at an angle.

"You gambled with cards or dice?"

"With neither, but with cowries (shells)".

"In that case, the game must have been played on the ground and not on tables," Hari Singh surmised.

"Yes, on a carpet on the ground."

"How many rooms were there in the house?"

"That I don't know. There might have been three or four. I was led into the main room by my companion through a gallery. There were bright lights all round and I sank into a thick cushion in one corner."

"Do you know the name of the owner of the house or its occupants?"

"I am a stranger in these parts. In my own town, I am renowned as a top-notch in all games of cards and dice. News reached me of high-stake gambling in this town. I filled my pockets with money and immediately came over to try and have a go. You know, we are like busy bees who make a bee-line for the hive," the stranger said, with a twinkle in his eye.

"But, then, why have you come to me?" asked the Inspector.

"To tell you my tale of woe, sir." The man sighed again and continued: "I met a man at the betel-seller's. Noticing my heavy purse, he spoke to me softly and asked whether I would like to have some good fun." When I enquired about the nature of the fun, he gesticulated in a revealing manner and smiled broadly: "No dance or music, but a game of cards, dice or cowries." I was tempted and readily agreed. He led me into the lane and thence to that house.

"Oh, can you give some details of the house?"

"Yes, sir. It has very heavy black doors at the main entrance. I noticed a dim green light above the door, which opened into a dark gallery beyond which was a small room, and further on a large rectangular room with bright lights, carpets and cushions."

"Whom did you meet in the room inside?"

"I was ushered in by the person who met me at the betel-seller's. As soon as I entered the main room, about a dozen persons, clad in the best white muslin and silk, welcomed me with broad smiles. One of them, an elderly man of fair complexion with a bald head, took particular interest in me. He asked my name, address and profession, made me comfortable on a cushion, offered me *pan-supari*, and rubbed scent on my clothes. Some of those present got busy gambling, while the rest got drunk and reclined against the walls. The heavy curtains in the room would quiver and a servant with glasses, whisky and soda in a tray would appear. He would offer drinks and snacks and they would fill themselves to their heart's content and roll down on one side."

The man narrated all this in some detail. The lines at the base of his plump cheeks were showing up more prominently. His lips were getting dry. It appeared that he too, had drunk well the night before and now the tide was at its ebb.

"You have admitted that you are a seasoned gambler. Now collect your thoughts and tell me how you lost all your money in one single night," Hari

Singh told him, jotting down something on a paper.

The fat man moved up nearer the table and whispered in the Inspector's ears: "When I joined the gamblers, I had good luck for a while. Then the stakes were raised and I lost. I suspected that the cowries with which we were playing had been 'hypnotised' by the winners. I protested, whereupon they allowed me to examine the cowries. I discovered nothing wrong with them. And then ill-luck so overtook me that I was totally ruined." The man opened his eyes wide and tears streamed down his fleshy cheeks.

"Don't be upset. So the cowries appeared to you to be 'hypnotised'," the Inspector spoke the words softly. He took out a steel ring from one of his hands and moved his fore-finger and thumb round it. "This is an unending circle," he murmured, and his forehead showed uneven wrinkles. He gazed at the table-lamp as if trying to see something far beyond it.

On the breakfast table, Hari Singh felt as though he was caught up in the cobwebs of a real mystery. The fat man, reclined against the wall, was snoring deeply, his one hand still inside his empty pocket. As Hari Singh poured tea into the cup and as the liquid swirled in concentric circles, he peeped into the centre of the smallest ripple and jumped up in his chair.

"Wake up, Lalaji, I will go with you to the gambling den this evening," he announced suddenly.

"Oh, how lucky I am, then my troubles will soon be ended."

"Come here at seven in the evening and we'll go together," said Hari Singh.

The fat man bestirred himself and walked away on shaky legs. Hari Singh busied himself devising a plan to get to the heart of the mystery.

In the evening, when the Lala knocked on the door and was admitted in, who should confront him but a bearded figure in a long sherwani and churidars and cap. The man had dark glasses and flowing moustaches. The Lala exchanged greetings with him and

then enquired: "Are you here to meet the Inspector Sahab?"

"Yes."

"I had an appointment with him at this time."

"So have I," said the Nawab.

"What appointments with two persons at the same time?"

"Oh, can't you see who I am?" the Nawab roared with laughter.

"Oh, you are the Inspector Sahab then, so completely changed."

"Now keep your counsel and don't make the fatal error of giving out who I am. When somebody questions you, tell him I am your friend. See this stick with a steel handle. A long steel sabre is hidden on it. One should go well armed to such places. Keep an eye on this stick. In case of emergency, the sabre will come out like this," and Inspector Hari Singh unscrewed a ring near the top of the stick and drew out a sharp-edged steel sabre which thinned into a small arrowlike point at the end.

When Hari Singh and the fat Lala reached the betel-seller's shop at the corner of the lane, it had grown dark. The wintry wind was cold and sharp. The bright lights at the betel-shop looked attractive in the gloom. The two loitered in the lane, the Lala pointing out the white-washed building in which he had spent the previous night. Its main door was closed. Inspector Hari Singh ran an eye over the lane, doors and windows of the house and other buildings near-about. Higher up, near the ventilator above the main door, he noticed a red light hidden under a shade.

"Let us spend some time at the betel-seller's before we seek entry into the house," suggested the Inspector.

"As you please."

Both of them walked down to the shop.

"How fortunate I am to see you again at my shop this evening. Please have these nice *pans*," the betel-seller welcomed them.

"Tell what hour do you keep this shop open?" enquired Hari Singh.

"When other shops close, I also lock up for the night, Nawab Saheb!"

"Your betels are good."

"Yes, Sir, well-to-do persons like you visit my shop. Therefore, I keep things of quality."

"Lalaji, you are perhaps on your way to that place," said the shopkeeper, with a twinkle in his eye. "Please remember to give me some bakshish out of your winnings when you return."

"That will depend on my luck," replied the Lala.

"Both you and the Nawab Saheb are lucky persons. See, that man is there to welcome you."

"Come this way, Lalaji," whispered the man, and, patting his shoulder, drew the Lala to one side.

"So your pockets are again heavy this evening."

"Not very heavy. Meet my friend, Nawab Saheb," the Lala introduced the stranger to Hari Singh, saying he had met him at the same shop the previous evening. They talked of nothing in particular for some time. The third man then exclaimed: "I can bet that you, Lalaji, and you, Nawab Saheb are bound to have good luck tonight. I can foretell that much from the lines on your forehead. Why delay? Come with me."

Both of them followed him into the lane till they reached the main door of the house. He looked up and Hari Singh focussed his attention where he was looking. The light above the door was green instead of red. The man knocked in the door softly and it was opened wide.

"Come in, Nawab Saheb and Lalaji," he invited, leading them into the main room. But, having introduced them to those present, he quietly slipped out.

"Who is this Nawab Saheb?" asked an oldish bald-headed person of Lalaji.

"He is my very good friend and a past-master in his art," replied the Lala.

Hari Singh, thinking that all attention was con-

centrated on him, adjusted his dark glasses and worked his way into a corner of the room. Sipping a cup of hot tea, he fixed his eyes on the wall opposite. There was no door or window to it. A hole under a large painting that hung on the wall was significant. Hari Singh's glance got riveted on that opening and, suddenly, he saw the rim of some round object in it. He looked at the thin circumference of the rim, unable to draw any definite conclusion.

"Please come and join in the game, Nawab Saheb," invited some of the gamblers gathered around.

"Oh yes, I am ready at all times," replied Hari Singh joining in. But his thoughts still lingered on the mystery of that hole.

The game with cowries progressed apace. Hari Singh won a few rounds. By force of habit, he took out the steel ring from his hand, moved it between his right forefinger and thumb, and then placed it on the floor. The stick with the steel handle lay by his side on the floor.

The cowries were once again thrown and this time the Nawab Saheb lost. His piercing eyes were fixed on the cowries. He picked up the steel ring, but it tended to stick to the floor and could be lifted only with an effort. This was unusual for the ring. He tried to move the stick, but there was again a feeling of stickiness on its steel handle.

Inspector Hari Singh suspected that things were not straight. This feeling of stickiness, for instance, was very intriguing. He played on for a while and then withdrew from the game after he had suffered some losses. The Lala continued for a while and then both of them sought permission to leave.

"Please come again, Nawab Saheb. You may be old in years, but we will make you young in spirit here," said one of the leading gamblers.

"We will certainly come," promised the Nawab, leaning on the stick and holding the Lala by the arm. Then they both walked out.

Throughout the next day, Inspector Hari Singh was greatly preoccupied, planning a raid on the gambling den. He indicated the house, its doors and windows, the lane and bylanes, on a map and fixed the disposition of policemen. He briefed them in detail on their duties. But, while doing all this, his mind was still wrestling with the riddle of the imperceptible forces that had held his steel ring to the ground for a while. He again held the ring in his fingers, watched it, and then cleaned it with his handkerchief, before settling down to work.

By evening, the contingent of plainclothes Policemen had taken their positions unobtrusively at the appointed spots. They lingered in ones and twos at strategic points so as not to arouse suspicion. Hari Singh, draped in his sherwani and churidars, again walked up to the main door of the building, along with the Lala. He noticed the green light under the ventilator. He gave a light knock on the door. It was opened this time by the bald-headed man. Craning neck out from between the doors, the man looked at them and exclaimed, "Hullo, Nawab Saheb and Lalajil. You have come at the right time. Come in, quick. We are about to start the game."

"This evening I will not be able to stay very long. I am indisposed," said the Nawab Saheb.

"What? You indisposed, Nawab Saheb. We will arrange for 'medicine' for you. What is your 'ailment'?"

"Nothing. It is just a slight pain below my ribs."

"Nawab Saheb has apparently a weak spleen and a weak heart. He needs some tonic". These words were spoken by a man who was sipping a glass of whisky as he sat gambling.

The main room where the game had begun had been done up neatly that evening. A new set of scarlet curtain hang on the doors. A fresh maroon-coloured carpet covered the entire floor of the room. In addition, multi-coloured cushions along the walls, polished statues of brass arranged in a corner, silver trays on

teapots, tinkling glasses and popping bottles added colour and hilarity to the scene.

The game progressed for some time. As had happened the previous evening, the Nawab Sahib and the Lalaji had good luck for a few rounds. Then there set in a turn in the tide and their losses mounted.

"Oh, I have a shooting pain in my tummy. It is unbearable. I must withdraw and take some medicine," cried the Nawab Sahib. He stood up on tottering legs, leaned on his stick, and then staggered towards the main door.

"Didn't I say he had a weak spleen?" said one of the gamblers, with knowing smile.

"Come back soon, Nawab Sahib. All your ailments will be cured in this very room," interposed another.

The disguised Inspector waved his hand, adjusted his glasses and walked out.

And then, suddenly, a whistle blew and there was a stamping of feet. The house had been surrounded. Next moment, the lights went out and an alarm bell rang in one of the rooms. The gamblers made a desperate bid to escape, but the flashing torches of policemen barred their way and, one by one, they were overpowered by the raiding party. Heaps of coins and currency notes, cowries, dice and packs of cards were recovered on the spot.

"The Nawab has cheated us," cried one.

"No, it is the fat Lala," exclaimed another.

"Perhaps it is both. These cunning fellows have ruined us," exclaimed a third.

Inspector Hari Singh carried out a thorough search of the house. In a room adjacent to the main apartment were found a number of intricate electric gadgets. An apparatus was mounted on a table with a funnel at one end which protruded into the hole in the wall. This hole opened into the main room near the base of a large painting. A labyrinth of electric wires went down deep into the floor of the room.

"Dig up the floor to find where this underground wire runs," roared the Inspector.

Hammers, pickaxes and shovels tore open the flooring of the room. The underground wires had crossed into the main room. A channel was, therefore, dug. The carpet in the main room was removed, and lo! in the centre was a thin plaster of cement. When this crust was removed, a hollow rectangular space, with a large solid structure inside, was revealed, box like in shape but scaled from all sides. Some electric wires were connected to it with screws from the main lead. A switchboard with switches of different colours was also recovered along with a set of batteries.

"This appears to be a mystery house of machines," said Inspector Hari Singh to the keeper of the den.

"Sir, it is nothing of the kind. We wished to install a radiogram for the entertainment of the visitors, that's all," said the bald-headed man in an attempt to explain things.

"Then why so many machines, batteries and wires?"

"These are for experiment. My son is a mechanic. This is his hobby."

"Experiments on what? Trickery and fraud?" shouted Hari Singh.

The gamblers kept mum. No one uttered a word.

An expert from the Scientific Department of the Police was sent for and he examined each article with care and thoroughness.

In a wooden box were found six volt batteries fully charged. They had approximately ten ampere hours' capacity. Two fairly long rubber sheathed wires joined these batteries to another apparatus which looked like a switchboard. On closer examination, it was discovered that it consisted of two solenoids with concentric plunger armatures and four heavy duty contact points. All these articles were fitted in a heavy wooden box. In it were also fixed the switches, which turned out to be reversing switches.

Another small wooden box was also recovered in

which were two cores on a steel yoke with an adjustable gap which could be varied by means of a steel bolt. According to the expert, this was polarising magnet.

The reversing switches and the polarising magnet were connected by electric wires to batteries. Thick insulated wires ran from the reversing switches into the underground channel to the main room, where in the hollow rectangular in the centre was placed a block of electromagnets. This block had four solenoids embedded in solid dielectric for greater insulation. It was of the colour of alabaster and was one cubic foot in volume, with large and small studs with screw-holes and fibres fixtures. A heavy steel plate was placed underneath this block of magnets to serve as a box-plate.

Some cowries and disc recovered were found to be magnetically loaded. On closer examination, it was discovered that ferromagnetic particles were embedded in them. These ferromagnetic particles were directly influenced by the magnetic field of the electromagnetic block and thus their throw was "directed" from a remote control.

The apparatus on the table from which a funnel-like thing was connected to the hole in the wall turned out to be a periscope through which the operator could have a clear view of the person who was to throw the dice or cowries.

The mode of operating these machines and gadgets was this: the operator, sitting in the adjacent small room, would put on a reversing switch and thus energise the underground electromagnetic block at that particular moment when some member of the gang was to throw the cowries or dice. The movements of the gamblers would be watched through the periscope. A powerful magnetic field would thus be created temporarily, and the cowries and dice with a ferromagnetic insert or core would be magnetically polarised and would behave in the desired fashion. The insert or core in the cowries would be repelled or attracted ac-

according to the similarity or dissimilarity of the poles in the electromagnetic block.

It was so arranged that the dice and cowries would have a permanent magnetic movement of north and south polarity on either of two opposite faces. This remote operation of the magnetic field could control the motion of the dice or cowries thrown directly on the floor under which the electromagnetic block was buried. The intensity of the electric current in the block from the batteries was regulated by means of adjustable coils and switches.

The particular gambling den thus turned out to be a 'House of Magnets' equipped with the latest scientific devices to dupe the unwary gambler.

—:o:—

In the Lock-up, for Love

ON a winter evening at Calcutta a Police Officer was busy in his office when the sentry on duty announced a businessman, who had sought an interview. The businessman was ushered in, sat on a chair and blurted out — "I am ruined! Please help me!"

"What is your trouble?" asked the Police Officer.

"My big car gone. Perhaps stolen from just in front of the Stock Exchange building in wide daylight."

"Please give details of your car. How did it all happen?"

"My chauffeur, foolish as he is, parked the car at the parking place near my office. He walked away to a hotel nearby, had his meals and rest. As he says, when he came out he did not find the car. It had just vanished."

"Surprising! What make was it?"

"It was a big car, a Chevrolet."

"Have you its Registration certificate with you?"

"My chauffeur kept the Registration certificate in the car. It vanished with the car. I can give you the Registration number. The other documents of its purchase, etc., are also here." He lay the papers on the table.

"Please tell me your name, your residence. We'll try to find the car. Is your chauffeur here? I'll talk to him."

"I am Seth Ratanmal in the Stock Exchange business. But now reduced to dust by the loss of this car. That foolish chauffeur is here. He is the cause of my ruin."

The Police Officer reassured Seth Ratanmal, advised him to be courageous and face the situation boldly. He promised all help by quick and thorough investigation.

He lighted a cigarette. Under the hanging light his smooth forehead looked broad owing to the receding hair in his head. His eyes were peering through the papers that Seth Ratanmal had laid on the table. The papers gave the details of the car, its make and model and the year of its manufacture. He carefully kept the number of engine of this car in his records. He asked the sentry to call in the chauffeur.

As the chauffeur, a lean man in fifties, dressed in white trousers and black buttoned coat of coarse cloth entered the office, Seth Ratanmal threw a glance of disdain and spoke, "Here is the rascal."

The Police Officer not listening to Ratanmal, asked the chauffeur, "Can you give the details of this case? How did it all happen? The car was in your charge, where were you?"

"Oh! sir! I am a broken man, lean in body and bad in health." The chauffeur trembled as he spoke these words.

"That I see, but tell me where you parked the car, at what time and where did you remain after parking the car?" questioned the Police Officer.

"I parked the car near the Stock Exchange building at the same place where I daily park it. Sethji comes daily to this building after heavy meals. I come hungry. So I have to eat at some shop or at a stall or cheap hotel. That is the reason of my broken health," the chauffeur continued — "See my sunken cheeks. Sir! I am being starved. I am over-worked by long hours of duty" — moaned the chauffeur as he supported his body on lean arms. His bony hands clasped the end of one chair.

"I don't wish to discuss about the problems of your health here. Tell me at what time did you park the car and leave for a hotel or shop to eat your meals. How long did you stay away?" asked the Police Officer.

"I left at about 11-30 in the noon as I was hungry. I ate food in the hotel nearby. I felt sleepy thereafter. Lay in a corner and woke up at three in the afternoon.

I smoked a 'bidi' and came to the car and lo! it was not there," muttered the chauffeur and closed his small eyes. He was dozing.

"Wake up and tell me if you had locked the car. Did you leave the keys of the switch in it? Where were the keys?"

"Sir, I didn't know that my pocket was torn. I put the keys in my purse and the purse in my pocket. God only knows where my purse slipped out. I searched and searched for it. Didn't find it. I lost some of my money along with the keys."

"You and your friends have stolen my car. You have ruined me. You are a cheat. You are a swindler," Seth Ratanmal burst forth.

"It's all wrong, sir. He accuses me falsely. I have served him all these years faithfully. He has denied me good food and has ruined my health," complained the chauffeur.

"Tell me, did you lock the door of the car when you went to the hotel?" questioned the Police Officer.

The chauffeur put his palm on his head. Numerous wrinkles crept up on his skinny forehead. He closed his small eyes and then stammered — "I think I had locked the door of the car but I am not sure."

"Do you remember who had a ride in this car with you last?"

"Yes, sir. The rich friends of Sethji had a ride in it only yesterday. They all liked the car, its cosy cushions. It is possible some of his friends might have taken away the car," said the chauffeur.

"You unreliable wretch, you blame my friends for the theft of my car. Each bone in your body is sordid. Why don't you tell the Police Officer if you had locked the car or had left all the doors unlocked?" Seth Ratanmal's eyes grew red with anger. His thick fleshy chest was heaving as he breathed.

"I don't remember. How can I say a wrong thing to you, sir, who will enquire and find out the truth."

The Police Officer decided to detain the chauffeur

for further interrogation after he had visited the spot from where the car had disappeared. He promised to continue his enquiry thereafter. They all left for the parking area near the Stock Exchange Buildings in Dalhousie Square.

A fortnight later, a taxi drew at the gate of a newly-built flat in the Lake area. Lake area is a fashionable locality in Calcutta where well-to-do persons reside. The setting sun's orange rays had bathed the palm and croton plants in the small verandah leading to the entrance. The resident of the flat rushed out of the taxi. He was a man in thirties. His hair dishevelled, his tie-knot drawn down the shirt collar. His gait unsteady, he ran to the bed room and fell flat. He lay there for long. He muttered something, waved his hands in the air and then closed his eyes.

An hour later the Police Officer arrived in a jeep. Dressed in khaki bushshirt and slacks, he walked with long strides to the verandah of the flat putting his cap on the small table, he pressed the button of the bell. The ring of the bell filled the air and the young man lying on the bed was startled. He got up with a jerk and moved forward to the verandah.

"Oh! You sir, I was expecting you all this time. I thought I was getting late. I rushed in a taxi from my office."

Both of them entered the sitting room and settled in the chair.

"Sir, I feel lost, completely lost. I don't know how I'll reach office and return in time."

"I have your report. You first drove your car to Tollygunge and then reached Dalhousie Square at about mid-day. You attended your office until 5 p.m. and when you came down, you found your car missing," spoke the Police Officer.

"Yes. That is right. How can I get my car, my new car," he sighed.

"Our efforts are in that direction. So the make of your car was 'Ambassador'?"

"Yes, it was thunder-grey in colour."

"When did you buy it and from where?"

"Oh, only a month back. I loved it. I liked its new bright grille, its new over-riders front and rear. Please find it out," the young man half-closed his eyes. He gave the name of the dealer from whom he bought the car.

"Please tell me, was this the first car you purchased at Calcutta?"

"No, sir. I had another car, a small one. I used it for two years. Then I struck a bargain and parted company with it."

"But why? Why did you sell it?"

"I sold it as I wanted a big car."

"Why did you buy a big car? Have you a large family?"

"No, I am a bachelor."

"Then, why a big car?"

"You know, sir, I am a happy-go-lucky type, well employed. I have host of friends. My small car was too small for all of them. So I sold it."

"To whom did you sell your car?"

"To a garage-owner. He owns a gasoline pump, a servicing station and a repair shop."

"How did you come across the garage-owner?"

"I take petrol from his pump. I am his old customer."

"Did you have your Ambassador car serviced at this Service Station?"

"No, sir, I purchased the car only a month back. It was covered by the warranty. Oh, how trim it was. How pretty was the design of its roof lining. What spacious interior and the adjustable front seat for leg room!"

"So you liked your car."

"Immensely. I threw a drink party in this room the day I bought my new car. We all jostled here in

joy. We drank and sang and danced. The chief mechanic of the garage, who was with us with his fiancée, composed a song there and then —

"Banerjee's Ambassador

Look to its decor

Sofa wide

Takes road in a stride

Through big wide doors

When the car roars

Behold your fair prey

In this Thunder-grey, Thunder-grey."

"We thundered in this room merrily. But alas! it was all so short-lived. It was a dream"

The young man closed his eyes. He stretched his legs.

"Who is this intelligent chief mechanic? How did you come across him?"

"This chief mechanic is my bosom-friend. He arranged the sale of my small car. His fiancée approved of the new Ambassador."

"Did you drive the car or the chief mechanic drive it?"

"Neither of us. The chief mechanic's girl friend drove the car. In the evenings we would drive it far out and on return sit down for drinks."

"Did any one else drive the car in your absence?"

"Yes, one evening that girl friend borrowed it for a long drive. She had come from Delhi. She kept the car for the night and next morning when she met me, she was full of praise for it."

"Please let me have the names and addresses of all your friends." The Police Officer noted the names and particulars of the young man's friends in his note-book.

"Don't suspect my friends, my chummy bosom friends. Please look out for the notorious car-lifters of the town, who have stolen my car," spoke the young man.

"Thank you for the advice. I know my job," replied the Police Officer.

It was a bright morning. Through a clear sky the sun spread its rays. Underneath the grey clouds light crept in first turning the edges into silver and then the grey film showed up with lustre.

Slanting rays fell on the table in the room. The Police Officer sat in his chair and examined the papers spread on the table. On the top were the documents of the purchase of Chevrolet car by Seth Ratanmal.

He studied the documents and noted the relevant details of the car.

A Sub-Inspector in smart uniform also examined some records and papers.

The Police Officer pored over the papers, puffed a cigarette and spoke softly, "You see, statistics are at times useful. Documents should be examined carefully."

"Yes, sir. I am examining these papers," replied the Sub-Inspector.

"What have these papers revealed?"

"Nothing very much so far. The statement of the chauffeur of Seth Ratanmal may be gone over, sir," suggested the Sub-Inspector.

"Yes, that chauffeur. His lean body as if made of twigs and his mind unbalanced. Seth Ratanmal had half-starved him."

"Sir, he is a skinny, bony fellow. But he appears dutiful."

"How do you conclude that?"

"Sir, when I wrote his statement, he stated that despite his miseries he kept Sethji's car in good running order."

"He was paid for that."

"He took good care of the car, changed the engine oil when it had run the specified limit, kept complete account of its runs," the Sub-Inspector spoke.

"Will you please check up the runs of the car a week or 10 days prior to the date of its disappearance," directed the Police Officer.

"Yes, sir, that chauffeur has method in his work. From his note book that was recovered in the search

of the hotel, where he had his meals on the day the car was presumably stolen, it appears that he kept a record of daily runs of the vehicle." The Sub-Inspector praised the qualities of the chauffeur.

"You appear to have taken a fancy for that rogue. I am glad to find some system of work in that unstable, shaking, starving chauffeur. Now come out with the details of runs of this car for the week preceding its loss."

"Yes, sir, his note book reads as follows:

First day of the week—Runs to Botanical Garden, Shivpur and Colvin Court.

Second day—Dalhousie Square, Wellesley Street, Hastings Street and to 'C' Motor Garage for repairs.

Third day—In 'C' Garage—no run.

Fourth day—New Market, Museum, General post Office.

Fifth day—Alipore, Kidderpore, Ballygunge, Chowringhee.

Sixth day—Dalhousie Square.

"Please go over these runs once again and tell me how long did the car remain in the motor garage," enquired the Police Officer.

"For two days."

"In what garage?"

"In 'C' garage."

"Please check up the list of motor garages and find its location. You should go to this garage, interrogate its owner and other personnel. Then report result of your enquiry to me."

"Very well, sir!" the Sub-Inspector replied.

The Police Officer decided to meet the fiancée of the chief mechanic and the friends of Banerjee. One of the friends was a famous pianist of an orchestra. He had a lengthy conversation with the Police Officer at the end of which he quipped, "Why do you bother about

Banerjee's car? Such things happen in life. He should have pots of money. In case he runs short of it, we'll all contribute. We'll buy a new car for him. Life should be full of joy and music."

He thereafter played on his piano and was lost in music. The Police Officer walked away quietly.

He visited another friend of Banerjee, whose sole hobby in life was horse-racing. He was interested in horses more than men. After a long talk, the horse-lover burst out — "Don't you please talk of Banerjee's car. Cars run and consume petrol. Horses run in races and bring money. There is no comparison between the two. Please tell Banerjee to buy a horse and ride on it. He weeps like a child for his car."

The third friend, who was a lecturer in a University, was polite and considerate to the Police Officer. He could not, however, provide a clue to the stolen car of Banerjee. He said, "I advised Banerjee not to bemoan the past. One should live in the present. The present is the cumulative fruition of the past. The essence of life is in the present. Cars come and go. They should not engross a man's life. A person lives for other higher ideals in this world."

The chief mechanic's girl friend had gone away to Delhi for some time. When she returned, the Police Officer one day deliberately met her. He dressed himself in civilian clothes and drove in his car to 'C' garage. Everybody was busy at his job in the garage. Cars were being repaired, were being run on trial runs and some engine blocks were being dismantled. The chief mechanic was at work on one of the dismantled engines. His girl-friend was near a new model car at a distance.

The Police Officer addressed the girl, "Madam! I have seen you here at times. May I seek your help?"

"What help?"

"I own an old model car. I have to get it repaired frequently. Will you please suggest some good mechanic, who could set it right?"

"You have to meet the owner of the garage and seek his advice. He is the master mechanic," she pointed to the Chief Mechanic and asked, "What car do you have?"

"An Austin."

"Why don't you go in for a new model car?"

"If I did that, I perhaps, wouldn't be coming here and meeting you. My old car brings me here and I see you, a charming lady."

She smiled and said, "What is the trouble with your car? I know something about cars."

"Oh! really? You seem to be versatile. Can you drive a car?"

"Why not? It's such a pleasure driving a new car. Come I'll see your car."

She came to the Police Officer's Austin car, examined it and advised him to sell off his old car and purchase a new one.

"Madam, a new car is like a new girl, who is to be looked after well, lest it slips out. You know a number of new cars have slipped out of their owners in this town," the Police Officer spoke.

She laughed, got in a new car and remarked "those who wish to own new things, should know how to keep them." She then drove away.

The Police Officer sought an interview with the owner of 'C' Garage. He was taken to a small room. A cumbrous Bengali gentleman dressed in a suit sat on a revolving chair. He spoke with a broad grin, "Please tell me, what service can I give you?"

"I am in difficulty. I have brought my car for repairs," replied the Police Officer.

"What is wrong with your car? Any major defect?"

"I have lost its ignition switch key."

"Don't you worry. This is a famous garage with famous mechanics. This is a minor job. But tell me where do you live? In this area? Please do patronise this garage. This will give you efficient service."

The owner of the Garage was inclined to be garrulous. His voice rose at a high pitch. He shook his head to press his point.

"I have known the fame of this garage. That's why I came here," spoke the Police Officer softly.

"Very good. Have some cold drinks. So you know this locality. Don't forget to recommend this garage to your friends. All makes and models of cars are repaired here. Have you some friends here?" The Garage owner ordered for coffee.

"Yes, I know Mr. Banerjee, who lives in a flat not very far from here."

"Which Banerjee?"

"The young Banerjee, who purchased a new car."

"And lost it? poor thing!"

"Yes, the same Banerjee. He is so sad over this loss."

"Surely, any body would be. That fair lady, my chief mechanic's friend, drove that car here and showed it to me. It was a wonderful grey colour car. We are all sorry." The round hanging cheeks of the owner of the garage shook as he spoke.

"Who is this fair lady?"

"She is a girl from Delhi. She has captivated my chief mechanic Wakefield. She inspires him to work. I keep quiet and watch. Wakefield is car-repair wizard. I'll call him. He will repair your car." The fat Bengali rang the bell and sent for John Wakefield and continued, "You know that the name of a garage depends on the quality of the mechanics it has. This is the most famous garage in this part of Calcutta. So many fellows open repair shops and garages and put spurious parts in place of genuine parts in the car. They earn money. I believe in honest dealings. Anybody who comes to this garage, gets on my list of permanent customers."

The Police Officer replied, "You interest me. I'll in future get my car repaired in your garage."

"So nice of you. It is gentlemen such as you that

help run our business. I am not a blood-sucker like other garage owners. You'll find me a warm friend. There is warmth in my bosom for my customers. I love my mechanics. It is a small empire based on love and friendship. How happy I am to have you here." As he finished these words, a young man dressed in overalls entered the room.

"Here is my chief mechanic John Wakefield." He shook hands with the Police Officer.

"Look here John, this gentleman has lost the keys of the ignition switch of his car. Please make another key for him."

"Which make is your car, sir?" enquired John Wakefield.

"It is an Austin car. I wish to use it urgently. I am in a hurry," spoke the Police Officer.

"Everybody is in a hurry in Calcutta. This garage provides service both to those who have leisure and to those who are in a hurry. John, please do this job quickly. This gentleman says that he is a friend of that young Banerjee, who bought a new car and lost it," the garage owner said.

"Are you Banerjee's friend? But I never met you even once at his parties." John Wakefield fixed his eyes on the Police Officer. "How long have you known him?"

"I have known him for some time. I live at another end of Calcutta. Banerjee was so shocked at the loss of his new Ambassador." The Police Officer felt as if he had been cornered by John Wakefield.

"I'll go and do the job. Please show me your car". Saying so John Wakefield left with the Police Officer.

"How did you drive your car when you had lost the key of the ignition switch?"

"What could I do? I cut the wires and connected them."

"So you know something of car mechanism."

"No, not much,"

The Police Officer took John Wakefield to his car.

The Chief Mechanic examined the switch and walked away towards a cabin in the garage. The Police Officer followed him to the cabin.

The Police Officer observed every movement of the chief mechanic, who opened the lock of a Godrej steel almirah. He took out a bunch of keys and quickly put them in the pocket of his oveall. The Police Officer had a glimpse of some number plates bearing Registration Numbers of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, which were in one of the shelves of the almirah. Some chisels and tools lay on the grease-soiled table in the cabin.

"Mr. Wakefield, do you get cars for repairs from other States also?"

. "At times, yes."

"This means the fame of this garage has gone beyond the boundaries of Bengal."

"You may conclude anything, but please don't bother me. You may sit for a while with the owner of the garage till I repair your car."

The Police Officer walked away. He noted the number of the Registration plates of U.P., and Bihar, in his note-book. He then walked into the office room of the garage owner.

"My John must be at the job. He'll not keep you waiting for long," spoke the garage owner.

"Your chief mechanic appears to be energetic and smart."

"Yes. He is handsome too. He has a fiancee."

"Has he been long with you? Does he come of a good family?" enquired the Police Officer.

"My John has been with us for ten years. He is a deft mechanic, indeed. He can even manufacture cars if given an opportunity. I pat him on the back and he works with redoubled vigour. He comes of a poor baker's family. His other brothers are truants. But John is a real genius. I wholly depend on him." The Garage owner was full of praise for John Wakefield.

"I agree. Your assessment of persons cannot be wrong."

"And do you know, the Anglo-Indian girls are crazy for him. He sings and dances with them. In the evenings he is gentleman at large unlike me, who sits with my old wife and talks to her and at times also quarrels," the garage owner burst into laughter.

"You are wonderful at conversation. Please tell me what you think of that girl friend of John Wakefield?" The Police Officer enquired.

"Oh! that slim and sly girl from Delhi. She wouldn't let John work. She is madly after him. She doesn't leave him even here in my garage. She once requested me to grant leave to John so that he remained with her. I flatly refused. Now she is stuck to him like a leech. This girl may ruin my business."

"This girl can, perhaps, drive cars," added the Police Officer.

"She drives car, she drives John and she drives me mad. You'll be amazed she can tinker about and repair minor faults in automobiles. This she has, perhaps, learnt from my clever mechanic."

"She should, perhaps, be going out with John or drives in the evenings."

"Surely. God alone knows what they do and where they go. John takes out good cars for trial runs and she slips into them by his side — a naughty girl. I don't mind. John intends marrying her."

"John Wakefield must be having some of his relatives at Delhi," the Police Officer said.

"May be. His old father had a bakery at Delhi. He died last year. His mother died when he was four years old. His two brothers must be roaming on the streets of Delhi. I know other garage owners were luring him to better terms. But I know he won't leave me and I won't leave him," spoke the garage owner,

"He appears to be devoted to you."

"So he is. He once confided to me that when he was a boy, his old father would work hard till late nights at the oven. His brothers would pry like hungry wolves for the cakes. They would steal the cakes and

devour them. John would cling to the legs of his father and then help him in his work. His father would praise this son as a man of action. See, Sir, I he has come so far and is bound to rise further." As the garage owner spoke these words, the chief mechanic entered the office and announced. "I've changed the ignition switch of his Austin car and have put in a new one."

"But I wanted only its key to be made," said the Police Officer, surprised.

"Your car is an old model car and needs a new ignition switch. Only in the new cars where the switch is still new that another key is made."

"This means I have to pay more in this garage for a minor job," asked the Police Officer.

"But you get a new thing, which will last long," promptly replied the chief mechanic.

The Police Officer shook hands with the garage owner and with John Wakefield and drove away. His suspicion had been aroused. He, therefore, ordered large-scale searches by the police of most of the garages including 'C' Garage. Nothing of interest was found as a result of these searches.

A number of car-thefts occurred. None of the cases had been investigated successfully so far. A special squad was set up to deal with this type of crime under the charge of the Police Officer of this Crime story.

It was the second fortnight of December. The night was dark. A pall of mist enveloped the city. On the sooty sky above some stars flickered. Street lights glimmered.

A thin-built person walked on shaky legs to the office of the Police Officer. He came up to the sentry and spoke, "I wish to see the Police Officer on an urgent work."

"But he is resting", replied the sentry.

"Please tell him that a man bearing a burden of

misfortune has come to seek redness."

"Is your work so urgent?"

"Yes — yes please, otherwise I wouldn't have come at this late hour."

A word was sent to him and the Police Officer was in his office.

"Sir, my car was stolen today from the cinema house. I saw the second show of cinema. And when I come out after the show, my car is nowhere to be seen." He paused for a breath.

"Which make was it? Where did you leave the keys of the car?" questioned the Police Officer.

"The keys are here in my pocket, Sir. I had locked the doors of the car. I drove it myself. I don't keep a driver. No one is to depend on drivers and chauffeurs. My Fiat gave me such nice service. It glistened in moonlight, in electric light. I purposely selected its black colour and kept it polished and shining. It filled my heart with joy. But alas, that joy was so short-lived. Now it is all mist within me, like this misty night." He took off his gold-rimmed spectacles and cleaned the glasses with his kerchief. A film of liquid crept in the eyes from the corners of the eyelids. He put his handkerchief on his eyes.

"Don't be upset, please. You make yourself comfortable in this chair. Regain your composure. I'll arrange to have a search of your car immediately." He noted the make and colour of the car. He then questioned, "Can you please give me further details of your car, of the exact place you parked it and the time at which you parked it. You say that when you came out of the cinema hall at the end of the second show, you did not find your car. The second show must have been over by midnight, but now it is about 2 a.m. Can you please account for the delay in coming here and not reporting the matter to police more promptly?"

The other man's lips quivered and his thin face grew longer. He put his hands in the pockets of his

coat and brought out some folded papers.

"Here are these papers that give some details about my car. The Registration certificate, the Insurance papers and my driving licence have all gone in the car. I collected some details from memory and noted them. Some details may be in the file which I kept about its repairs, servicing, etc. I couldn't lay my hands on that file. I rushed to my flat from the cinema hall in search of this file. Hence the delay in cinema here. Sir, I am living by myself. I depend on my attendant. He misplaces my things. But I have to put up with all this."

The Police Officer examined the papers carefully. "So you kept a note about the repairs and servicing of your car carefully."

"Yes, Sir."

"When was your car last repaired and at what place?"

"In the end of October this year in the 'C' Garage."

"In the 'C' Garage. Significant." He paused again.

"How long did it stay in the garage and for what repairs?"

"Two days for replacing the exhaust component and for some defects in its distributor."

"Come along we'll drive to the cinema house and to your flat." The Police Officer got into the police car. The thin-built man sat beside him.

They sped on the roads, spoke very little. His fellow-passenger was glum.

The inspection of parking site near the cinema did not yield much information. The cinema house had closed. There was nobody there except the Chowkidar snoring at the main entrance. All vehicles had gone. The night was desolate.

The car engine whirled into labyrinth of streets and halted below a large four-storeyed building. The thin built Bengali with gold rimmed glasses led the Police Officer up a narrow flight of stairs to his flat on

the second storey. He unlocked his sitting room, put on the light and delved into heaps of dust laden files and papers.

"I had kept the file. It should be here."

"You have a heap of papers. May I know your profession?"

"I am an Insurance agent. Have a booming business. But dust of disgust is covering me like these files. I have to move about for business. My car is gone."

"Why don't you call your attendant to help you in finding the file?"

"Oh! that attendant. He is worse than the urchins on the streets. I had warned him of my late return at night. He insisted to see both the first and second Shows. This is what one has to put up with when alone."

"Why do you live alone when you have good business?"

"I am a lonely man. My wife preceded me to heavens. Since then I am like a broken reed." He wiped his wet eyes with his handkerchief.

"When did you have your Fiat car for repairs in 'C' Garage, which appears to be at a distance from here?"

"Sir, the owner of the garage is a Bengali. I picked friendship with him through a lady. It was a business friendship. He went in for Insurance and I promised to have my car repaired at his garage."

"Oh, I see. How through a lady?" asked the Police Officer.

"I'll tell you all about it. I wish to search my file and show it to you." The Bengali gentleman was busy in searching the records in the room. He threw all the papers on the floor. He reached for a bundle of files on the top of the almirah. He threw them down with a thud. Particles of dust flew all round. He discovered the file of his Fiat car mixed in these papers.

"I have found it, got it. See, how methodically I keep my records."

"Yes. I see a method in confusion. Any way, please give me this file."

The Police Officer examined the file and noted the details of the Fiat car. It had the Calcutta Registration Number. No other details were available.

"Please tell me how you came across the owner of 'C' Garage?" queried the Police Officer.

"You know, Sir, I am in the Insurance business. one evening a smart pretty girl entered my office. She spoke sweetly, told me that she was doing the Insurance business at Delhi, had experience of it. The secret of business was to go after rich guys, angle them and hook them. Since I had a new car, my task would be easy. She would introduce me to the big boss of 'C' Garage, persuade him to go in for a policy of Insurance and in future, have my car looked after in the garage. She was a clever girl."

"Did you go to the owner of 'C' Garage with the girl?" Can you recollect the features of the girl?"

Yes, sir, she had a fair complexion. She was slim and of medium height. Had blue eyes and brownish hair. She appeared to be an Anglo-Indian, spoke English fluently."

"That's good. Did she tell her name?"

"No, sir."

"So you both drove together to the 'C' Garage I presume."

"Yes. I drove the car and she sat beside me on the front seat."

"Can you please recall the conversation with her?"

"I didn't speak much. She chattered all the way. She liked my Fiat car. She advised the engine needed tuning and that she would have it done for me in the garage."

"What happened then?"

"We drove to 'C' garage. She introduced me to the owner, a bulky jovial person — not like a dry stick like me. We struck a bargain of mutual business."

"What business?"

"I promised to advise all officers of my company to have their cars repaired at 'C' garage. He assured me to charge for repairs of my car at concessional rates. I in return insured him for a heavy amount."

"That's good business. The replacement of the exhaust component of your car took two days, you said."

"Yes. My office was closed for two days for a holiday. So I was in no hurry."

"Please come along with me to the owner of the 'C' garage. I am driving there," spoke the Police Officer.

The night's curtain of darkness was lifting in the far distance. There was a nip in the air. One could smell the approaching morn.

The Police Officer's vehicle sped on the lanes and by-lanes for a long time. It stopped in a by-lane in front of an old flat on the ground floor. The Police Officer knocked the door. The thin Insurance Agent stood at the back. One knock, two knocks, three knocks and then several knocks. The door at last opened ajar. The fat Bengali, rubbing his eyes, stumbled out.

"Sorry to disturb you so early."

"Oh, no! You, Sir! What brings you here? Come in and be seated." He led them in his sitting room.

They all sat in low chairs, the owner of the 'C' Garage slumped into his easy chair. He yawned wide, putting his fat hand on Insurance Agent's shoulder, he exclaimed "How are you here my friend? Have you arranged a police raid on my house?"

"No, no, how can I let down my friend?" The Insurance Agent spoke softly.

"Don't doubt him. I have brought him with me. You already know this gentleman?" asked the Police Officer.

"Yes, he is both my friend and customer."

"He brought his Fiat car for repairs to your garage."

"Yes, sir. And his car was repaired well in my famous garage."

"Please tell me who repaired his car?"

"One of the mechanics in my garage."

"Presumably the chief mechanic."

"Yes, yes. My chief mechanic."

Turning attention to the Insurance Agent, he remarked "Why are you so quiet, my friend? Now it is dawn and you must chirp like a bird."

"I have lost my car."

"What! your Fiat car?"

"Yes. Somebody drove it away."

"Sorry to hear this. These days, sir, so many cars are being stolen in Calcutta. The police must do something. I don't like people losing their cars as they have to buy new cars in their place. This affects my business. Older models are brought to my garage regularly as an old man has to go to hospital. It takes time for new cars to wear out." The garage owner again put his fleshy hand on the shoulder of the thin Insurance man and consoled him.

"Please tell me where must your chief mechanic John Wakefield be at this hour?" questioned the Police Officer.

"Mr. John told me that he was to visit Madras and other places. I sanctioned him leave. It'll effect my work but he is to get married."

"Where — at Madras?"

"No, perhaps at Delhi or may be at Madras."

"Thank you. I have an urgent duty elsewhere. I'll go. I'll meet you again." The Police Officer got up and left with the Insurance Agent.

The Officer's vehicle running through the criss-cross of lanes stopped near the flat of the Insurance Agent.

"You may please get down here. I will call you when I need you," said the Police Officer and drove away.

Calcutta had not awakened in early December night's slumber. The mist hung on the tall buildings

and descended in narrow streets. The Police Officer's car was speeding. It stopped at 'C' Garage. The watchman there was alert and challenged the stranger.

"You come here at odd time," he spoke.

"I wished to see John Wakefield, the chief mechanic," the Police Officer replied.

Stamping his sturdy lathi on the ground, the watchman raised his voice "That mechanic is not here. At this hour I am in-charge of this garage. That despicable mechanic is a night-wanderer and pretends to work. How can he work well? He is not dutiful like me."

"I am keen to consult him about this car," the Police Officer said.

"You may please note his address as I tell you." The watchman told the address of Wakefield.

The Police Officer drove again and stopped underneath a row of rooms. Going up a flight of stairs he passed into a long corridor on either side of which were all rooms on the first floor. This building was four-storey high with a similar arrangement of rooms on each storey. He stopped in front of Wakefield's room. It was locked. He pressed the button near the door of the opposite room. After a while the door opened. A young man appeared in his sleeping suit.

"Sorry to disturb you and take you out of bed, but I have an urgent personal work with Mr. John Wakefield," the Officer apologetically uttered these words."

"Sorry, he is not here."

"Where is he?"

"He is out of Calcutta."

"Out of Calcutta? Amazing? He had an appointment with me. Where has he gone to?" Enquired the Officer in surprise.

"But tell me, who are you and why are you inquisitive about my friend?" the young man questioned.

The Officer gave obviously a wrong name and address, "I wished to have consultations with him about

sale of my car. Now I'd send a wire to him. Please tell me his address."

"You have chosen a wrong time. This is no hour to consult a gentleman when the whole world is asleep," the young man replied stiffly.

"I am sorry. But this peculiar situation has compelled me to come here."

The young man unwillingly gave the address of John Wakefield at Delhi. He spoke curtly "My friend travels in fast cars. You can't communicate with him in the way. You please excuse me. I am sleepy." He closed the door of the apartment.

The Police Officer again drove to 'C' Garage. The watchful watchman was there and asked, "Did you find the abode of that so-called mechanic?"

"I met one of his friends there. I conclude that Wakefield had left for Delhi, whereas his master says that he has gone to Madras."

"Didn't I tell you. He is a rascal. An expert angler. He must have gone to Delhi. I hear pretty girls live in Delhi. He often goes there."

"What? Is he fond of fishing also?"

"No, No, he angles a new pretty girl each time." A broad smile lit the watchman's face. His grey thick moustaches could barely hide the broken teeth in his mouth.

"You are keen at observing." The officer admired him.

"Yes, my eyesight is good. My health is good. See my broad wrist, my iron grip and strong biceps." He displayed his muscular arms.

"Please tell me which car has Wakefield bought recently? In which car has he left for Delhi?"

"He brought a glistening black medium size car here. He sprayed it all over with grey or cream-colour. I don't remember the colour as I feel sleepy in the day. That fool of a mechanic boasted that he was making the car look better."

"Did it look better in its new colour?"

"No, I don't think so. He can't make cars look better than what they come from the factory. He can only assemble a junk. I doubt he can afford to purchase a car. His girl friends are taxing his finances and he runs like a fool." The watchman again smiled broadly.

Bidding the watchman good bye, the Police Officer sped to police headquarters. He sent wireless messages to all the states regarding Fiat car which was suspected to have been stolen.

The mist of the early morn had not lifted. The birds were leaving their roost. The twigs of trees waved in the breeze. On both sides of the broad road dark shining speck moved very fast on the road. For an hour or so after this speck could be discerned a car. Five persons were in the car.

The car drew up at the house of a senior Police Officer at Burdwan. It stopped there for about half an hour. It again sped on the road to Patna. The journey to Patna was long and tiring. Persons travelling in the car stopped at a number of places en route for rest and for enquiry. When they reached Patna, they were tired. Some of them rested while the Police Officer drove to the office of the Senior Superintendent of Police, Patna. He discussed at length with the Senior Superintendent of Police, Patna, about the occurrences at Calcutta and revealed his conclusions that the stolen Fiat car was perhaps on way to Delhi by road and that it must have surely passed through Patna. He gave full particulars of the car and the suspected car lifter.

The onward journey towards Delhi again began. Passing through crowded roads and green fields of Bihar, the party entered U.P. They spent the night at Varanasi.

Next day they all reached Allahabad. The Police Officer-in-charge of the party called on me in my office. I was then the Senior Superintendent of Police, Allaha-

bad. I listened with interest the full details of the car-theft cases at Calcutta which this Police Officer was investigating and which brought him here. He thought that the Fiat Car bearing Registration Number of Calcutta was, perhaps, on its way to Delhi.

"It should be about 24 hours ahead of me, sir, as we had to stop at Burdwan and Patna and Varanasi for enquiry. The car-lifter should have also stopped on the way for some time. But his car is smaller and ours is big. We, perhaps, drove faster."

"Possibly, but car-lifters try to run their vehicles fast too, fearing they might be chased. In any case, instructions had been issued by me to my officers to be on the look-out for this car. A wireless was received here from Calcutta police to that effect."

The Calcutta Police Officer, gave me full details of the Fiat Car which was presumed to have been stolen.

I phoned the Police Officer, in-charge of Traffic Police, to get at once the Registers of Traffic Check Posts at Phaphamau and Police Station, Dhoomanganj, on Kanpur side on the G.T. Road. These Traffic check posts had been set up on the Grand Trunk Road. This road enters Allahabad town from Varanasi. There is a rail-cum-road bridge over River Ganga at Phaphamau. All in-coming and out-going traffic to and from Allahabad had to pass over this bridge. This traffic check post was manned by two traffic constables round the clock. A head constable checked the work of constables frequently. The Traffic Police men were required to enter the Registration Number and description of vehicle, probable time of entry or exit, in this Register for each date of the month separately.

In my office the Police Officer incharge of city and the Police Officer of Calcutta Police scrutinised each entry in the Registers of the two city Traffic Check Posts. This scrutiny lasted for a long time. Entries of incoming Road Traffic on G.T. Road indicated the entry into Allahabad of a number of vehicles — private

Trucks, Public Carriers, Buses, Pick-ups, Jeeps and Cars. Vehicles bore Registration Numbers of Rajasthan, Delhi, Punjab, U.P., Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. None had the Registration Numbers of West Bengal, Orissa, Maharashtra, Assam, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir States in northern India. The entries in the Register of out-going vehicles from Allahabad Town on G.T. Road revealed that they remained in Allahabad from one day to a week or so. The heavy vehicles were mostly in this category. Some of the cars drove through Allahabad during the same day. These were mostly vehicles registered in other States.

"None of the cars that entered Allahabad town recently appears to bear West Bengal Registration Number. But there is one Fiat Car bearing the Bihar Registration Number which has been detained at Kotwali," spoke the Police Officer, in-charge of city.

"What is its colour and why has it been detained?" I asked.

"Sir, its colour is grey. The person who drove it appeared to be hot-headed. He quarrelled with the Head Constable, Traffic, and even assaulted him at Phaphamau check post."

"Come out with more details of this incident," I said.

"The Head Constable stopped the Car, noted its Registration Number as indicated on its plates. He wanted to inspect the Registration Certificate, at which the person who drove the car flared up, caught hold of the Head Constable by the collar, abused him and shouted that he was a man in hurry and the police of this town was delaying him and pestering him."

"What happened then?" I enquired. "The Head Constable overpowered him with the help of other Traffic Constables. Brought him to Police Station Kotwali and got him locked up. A case has been registered against him for assaulting a Government servant on duty."

"Did he possess the Registration records of the car that he drove?" I asked.

"No, sir! He said that he had misplaced them somewhere. He couldn't produce them."

"He should be prosecuted under Motor Vehicles Act also," I advised.

"Very well Sir." The Police Officer incharge of City agreed with me.

"When did it all happen?"

"Last evening at about sunset."

"It appears that the car after which I and my officers have travelled all the way from Calcutta is not in this town," spoke the Calcutta Police Officer.

"Perhaps not. It is possible that that car might have taken another route to Delhi via Lucknow from Varanasi or it might have turned to Lucknow Road prior to entering Phaphamau Bridge." The City Police Officer put forward his theory.

"No hasty conclusion, please." I suggested.

The Calcutta Police Officer was disappointed. It appeared we were up against a dead wall. I asked the Calcutta Police Officer to stay on at Allahabad till next day. Thereafter, he could either leave for Delhi or return to Calcutta. He agreed to stay on.

Turning to the City Police Officer I said, "What type of fellow you have kept in the lock-up? Is he educated or is he a rustic driver?"

"Sir, he appears to be educated. Speaks English with slangs," replied the City Police Officer.

We were all quiet for a while. It occurred to me that I should meet this person in the lock-up who had assaulted the Head Constable of Traffic Police and who violated the provision of Motor Vehicles Act. I wanted to interrogate him. All of us, therefore, drove to P. S. Kotwali, Allahabad.

A grey-colour Fiat was parked inside the compound of P. S. Kotwali. It had number plates of Bihar

State. We inspected this car. There was nothing unusual. I, however, directed the Police Officer in-charge of Allahabad city to send a wireless message to Police at Patna to check and verify the Registration Number of this Car and to signal to us the name of its owner and driver. Neither these Registration number nor the name of the owner could be verified. Later they appeared bogus.

We then met the man in the lock-up who had assaulted the Traffic Police Head Constable. He was a smart, young man of fair complexion. He was clean-shaven and kept his hair well-groomed. He looked respectable. Seeing me he spoke in English, "Sir, the Police of this town are discourteous and troublesome. They are harassing me unnecessarily over a minor incident. I don't deserve to be here. I should have been on the road to Delhi. I have to reach there urgently. Please give me freedom and let me go."

The Calcutta Police Officer had fixed his gaze on this person for a while and drew me aside. He whispered to me impatiently and softly, "Sir, the bird is in the nest. Don't let him go." He then walked to the lock-up and his conversation with the person in the lock-up was as follows:

"You are the chief machanic of 'C' Garage Calcutta. Ar'nt you?"

"And how are you here? How is your car working? Satisfactory I trust," the man in the lock-up replied.

"My car is running well. With your expert touch any car would run well," the Calcutta Police Officer said.

"The pity is that, they don't let me run my own car. I should have been in Delhi by now. But see I'm stuck up here."

"Bad luck for you. You were driving this grey Fiat."

"Yes, sir."

"When did you buy it?"

"Only recently."

"And when are you getting married?"

"Oh! I was on my way for the wedding."

"The wedding of Miss Mary Dashwood with Mr. John Wakefield."

"How do you know all that? It's my private affair."

"I know something more, which you will learn presently." The Police Officer spoke stiffly. He took me aside and poured forth these words in one breath, "Sir, this is the notorious car-lifter of Calcutta. I had been chasing him all the way. Our efforts have been crowned with success in this holy city of Ganga and Yamuna. Another case of car theft should be registered against him."

That person was John Wakefield. On his personal search a fountain pen, a pencil, a note book had been recovered from his right breast-pocket. An autographed photograph of his fiancée and a bunch of keys had been recovered from his left breast-pocket. The keys in the bunch were mostly those used in ignition switches of cars. He kept mum when questioned about the bunch of keys.

On closer examination of the Fiat car, it was found that its original colour was black. It had been sprayed with grey-colour in a hurry, with ostensible intention of changing its complexion. The engine number of the car tallied with the number which the Police Officer of Calcutta had of the insurance agent's Fiat car. This had been mentioned in the report of theft of this car at Calcutta.

The search of his baggage led to the recovery of several Registration Certificates and tokens, apparently forged, a number of sets of Registration Number plates, some of West Bengal, Bihar, Delhi and Punjab. The original Number Plates of this car were of West Bengal. The tyre number of all the tyres tallied with those entered in the records of Calcutta Police Officer.

On a search of his suit case, costly woollen suits, dinner suit, ties, and shoes were found. Underneath all of them wrapped in a tool-bag were found small size instruments of various type. Kept inside the tool bag was

found a soft material in a polythene wrapper.

After sometime John Wakefield, perhaps psychologically settled to the realisation of his fate, the Calcutta Police Officer and I sat together. I spoke to him in soft words: "Mr. Wakefield, you are an intelligent person. Let us share your knowledge of these frail keys in that bunch found in your pocket. What good are they now? Of what use have they been to you?"

"They are of value to a mechanic, sir, not to a layman." He again relapsed into silence.

"I know your dexterity as a mechanic. Should I ring up 'C' Garage, Calcutta, and enquire from your master if it was in his knowledge that you brought these keys." It was the turn of the Calcutta Police Officer to pick up the thread of enquiry.

"No, sir! No, sir! Please don't do so. My master does not know of them. They are in the personal charge of the head mechanic of the garage. My master also does not know about this Fiat car."

"Don't bluff me, Wakefield. Are the stolen cars the personal charge of the head mechanic? Am I to conclude that your master does not know of these affairs?"

"He does not know. He is innocent. He is simple." He took a deep breath and continued, "You don't seem to like me, sir. I am a lonely man here. You talked to me so well in the garage at Calcutta. Am I so unwanted now?" Wakefield moaned.

"No, Wakefield, no. I like you. You are an expert. Please be truthful. You are a Christian. Follow the teachings of Christ."

"I will. I am religious. I go to Church every Sunday. My wedding was to be celebrated in a Church. I promise to be truthful," he stopped, closed his eyes, and continued, "I'll speak all about them. I am sure. Lord Chirst will save me. Now I speak the truth."

At my house, the Calcutta Police Officer adding poetic touches, narrated in detail the incidents of car thefts at Calcutta, specially those with which he was associated as a supervising and directing officer. He

told me of the dubious role which Miss Mary Dashwood, the fiancée of John Wakefield, played in this game of car thefts. She would advise the regular customers to purchase new model cars. She would get friendly with those who possessed new cars. She would drive their cars, at times, make their ignition switch keys available to Wakefield, so that he may make a duplicate key. She was a lady possessed of immense charm and trickery. The main portions of the story are based on my conversation with him, which I still treasure and cherish.

John Wakefield, the notorious car-lifter, under arrest, later admitted the crimes he had committed and specially this crime. His confession was revealing. He accepted having stolen Seth Ratan Mal's Cheverolet car. This car was at Delhi with the family of his fiancée. After wedding he and his fiancée planned to go out for honeymoon trips in it. His friend Banerjee's Ambassador car was broken up and sold in bits in Calcutta. Its parts fetched good price. He had tried his hands at many other cars at Calcutta and sold them there after altering their identity and punching new engine numbers on the engine blocks. In the present case of Fiat car, he was in a hurry to reach Delhi for his wedding. He had no time to do all that he had done with other cars that he had stolen. He could only get time to paint it with grey colour and to fix Bihar registration number plates in place of its original plates.

When questioned about the bunch of keys recovered from his pocket, he gave out that the keys were as dear to him as his heart and so he kept the bunch in his left breast pocket. With these keys he could open the door-locks of any make of car. He could use them in the ignition switches of cars with success. This made his task easy as he could drive away any car, small or large, at will even though the owner had it locked.

"Sirs, I am a bit of a scientist, an inventor. My

father discovered my qualities. I am the chief mechanic of 'C' Garage at Calcutta. A number of cars were brought for repairs, servicing, etc. Any car for which I took fancy, will certainly be mine after a while. I knew the art of making duplicate keys," Wakefield boasted.

"How did you make the duplicate keys? Please tell us. It should be interesting," I asked.

"I am now with you. Please listen. I took the impressions of the ignition keys of the cars that I selected, is Plastecine. I preserved those impressions and later chiselled the plain keys to match those impressions or in some cases where it could not be done, I even made the moulds and then the keys. Was it not a clever job, sir? I carry the fine tools for this job with me." He admitted as he realised that he could not get away from us and the law.

He was silent for a long time. He mused over some thing. He saw across with longing looks.

He suddenly beseeched us, "Please forgive me and let me go. I wish to be free like a bird and fly to Delhi. I promise to come back here to you to face punishment. Alas! She will be alone at the New Year Dance. I promised to dance with her. Hear me, sirs. On last New Year's Dance when we had our life's decision, Mary Dashwood looked bewitching. We both danced. Then we sat and had drinks together. I spoke to her of the wonderful time I had with her. But she whispered "it could be nicer still". "How dear?", I asked. "In a new car. I and you alone."

"Yes, yes, Sweetie! In a big car, on to the hills of Kashmir for honeymoon!"

"She slid close to me and we drank and drank till it was morn. Now you know, sir, why I took away these cars. To be happy and moneyed. For Chirst's sake forgive me and free me. How good all of you are!"

We kept quiet. John Wakefield was remanded to judicial custody. He was transferred to Calcutta and the Fiat car was also taken there.



Out of the Watery Grave

IN the vast chasm of the Jamuna river below, the sunlight of the evening had splashed colours as if of broken rainbows. The summits of the hillocks on the opposite bank looked at first dull brown with yellow fringes of the leafless *kareel* shrubs, but they took on a new appearance as they were capped with the rosy-golden hues of the sun. We were staring at this pageantry of colour in the fading light. Standing on the ridge, popularly known as Chandi Karar, the sun-crowned hillock in front seemed to tumble into the chasm of the river below. And in the depths of that river lay the mystery which we sought to unravel.

Chandi Karar, or the Silver Ridge, is the name given to a portion of the bank of the Jamuna in the far-off sub-division of Ba¹, in Agra district. It was perhaps the vivid play of colours on the crest of the ridge that gave it this name. It was said that fine particles of sand at this spot were always reflected in a silvery glow. Neither the bright gold of the rising sun nor the slanting rays of the evening disappearing in a faded bronze could change its eternal silvery glory. However, we had assembled on that ridge not to analyse the reasons for its strange name, but to solve the mystery locked up in the rippling bosom of the river at the spot.

"Sir, the river here is fathomless and the current under the placid waters swift. It is somewhere around this spot that the dead body of Shyam Lal is said to have been thrown," the Investigating Officer explained, breaking the silence.

"I see."

I paused for a moment. Then a sudden thought flashed in my mind and I said, "Have you been able to find out whether the body was thrown into the river

up or down the current from this ridge.

"It is difficult to be certain. Nobody is coming forward to say anything about the incident. Everyone is in mortal fear of the murdering hounds who have committed this gruesome crime," replied the Station Officer of Jaitpur Police Station, in whose jurisdiction the incident had occurred.

"Oh, no eye-witnesses, no circumstantial evidence?"

"No, sir."

"Any other clues?"

"No."

I got exasperated. Placing my kerchief on my forehead. I said: "Look here, the most important clue would obviously be the recovery of Shyam Lal's corpse."

"Sir, so far our enquiry has been based on here-say. Some people at first gave out that Shyam Lal was murdered at his house, his dead body taken to the Chambal, and there, at a lonely spot, burnt in a heap of dry bushes and cowdung cakes and then consigned to the river. I spent one full day in getting the bed of the Chambal dredged, but it yielded no useful result. Then the rumour was set afloat that Shyam Lal was shot dead somewhere on the way and his corpse either buried in the ravines or thrown into the Jamuna. God knows what is the truth," the Sub-Inspector uttered these last words with a long face.

"All right, all right. There is no cause for despair. We should first search the river and then the ravines. There are chances of the corpse's having flowed down, so we must hunt in the waters first. The ravines are static and can be dealt with later. Let us assume that Shyam Lal's dead body or its ashes was not consigned to the Chambal, but thrown into the Jamuna. You have already searched the Chambal bed. Now it is the turn of the Jamuna. Call all the good divers, fishermen and boatmen in the locality and let them scour these waters with fishing-nets."

"I will carry out your instructions," said the Sub-Inspector.

The waters below Chandi Karar were swirling and murmuring. I listened to their music with a heavy heart as a sense of despondency was growing on me.

A report of this case had reached me from Jaitpur Police Station of Agra district. Shyam Lal Brahman, who was a wealthy landlord of a village situated on the undulated tract of land between the Jamuna and the Chambal, had been taken away forcibly from his house by some daredevils. It was strongly suspected that he had been murdered, as his whereabouts could not be ascertained. The motive of the crime appeared to be some old enmity. This brief report set me thinking and I decided to visit the village same evening.

Travelling by jeep I reached the village after negotiating some sharp bends and dangerous slopes. This piece of land was criss-crossed with ravines and sand hillocks. The pucca house of Shyam Lal stood prominently on the outer edge of the village. A sense of nervousness and fear hung over the village. A number of villagers clustered round me and narrated different tales of how Shyam Lal had been spirited away from the village by the miscreants.

"He was bundled off and put on the back of a camel and then taken across the Chambal," said one.

"No, sir, no. That is not correct. Shyam Lal, being a strong and hefty person, could not have been taken like that. He was made to walk some distance and then driven away in a bullock-cart by the cart-track which runs alongside the Jamunā," burst out another.

"They are both wrong, they do not know the facts," said a third. "He was shot dead here at the house and then his body was put in a sack, which was dragged for a distance and then loaded on a pack-horse. The corpse was buried in the ravine somewhere. See, here are the blood marks on this wall and floor."

This was getting curiouser and curiouser. I, however, observed with care the spot which was stained with blood. A large patch of blood was prominent on one of the walls of Shyam Lal's *baithak* (sitting-room).

The Sub-Inspector took me aside and told me that he had scraped some blood from this spot along with some hair which he thought were of human beings. He pointed to some finger-prints which were also discernible near the blood stains. These prints were developed and photographed by the official photographer who had accompanied me.

"These finger-prints could be either those of Shyam Lal, who might have put up a struggle after being injured, or they could be those of the criminals who assaulted him," I pointed out to the Sub-Inspector.

"In case we succeed in tracing Shyam Lal, we will compare them with his finger-impressions. This will be a valuable piece of evidence, in any case," the Sub-Inspector agreed.

"But tell me what was the motive of this crime?"

"Old enmity fostered by age-old factions among the people of the village. This old man will tell you everything about the bickerings that the villagers had with Shyam Lal," the Sub-Inspector said, introducing a person in tattered clothes who was only willing to tell me everything provided he was taken to a secluded spot, away from the crowd. I readily agreed to the proposal and, once alone with me, the old man delivered himself thus:

"Sir, Shyam Lal was ferocious-looking man with a face plump as a pumpkin. His nose was curved like a parrot's and his dealings were as crooked. His twirled black moustaches mounted on thick lips, symbolised his authoritarian attitude. He would smile and grin broadly when requesting the poor innocent villagers to work in his fields. But, when it came to paying their wages, his eyes, red with the intoxication of wine would burn with anger and he would twitch his lips and wink at his henchmen, who would make ready to bring down their thick lathis upon the villagers who, poor wretches, would run away out of fear.

"He was a veritable demon and oppressor of human beings. Once, somehow, he managed to have the

houses of his opponents, the Thakurs, searched by the police. This was the last straw on the camel's back. From that day, the Thakurs harboured a perpetual grudge against Shyam Lal. They were even heard to say that they would do away with the tyrant. I belong to no party as I am an Ahir by caste. I supplied milk both to Shyam Lal and to the Thakurs. But these days, sir, it is difficult for anybody to remain neutral in the factions of the village."

"You are a very wise old man. Tell me something more about Shyam Lal and his activities."

"Oh, he was as rich as a king but a real skinflint. He was so tight-fisted that even the mistress he kept in one of the outer rooms of his house did not get her due. She was mostly maintained on food and clothes. At one time, she narrated her tale of woe to some boys of the village and, since that day, she was kept locked in her room by Shyam Lal."

"So he was fond of wine and women?"

"Yes, provided he got both free. And his friends arranged for both. In return, Shyam Lal offered them one of the rooms of the house for gambling purposes. Gambling and drinking bouts would continue there till the small hours of the morning, so much so even members of his own family were getting disgusted with the state of affairs. But God is great and omnipotent. Shyam Lal has got his due. Even so, please try to trace him. However bad he may have been, he was of our village, he was one of us," the old man pleaded.

It was discovered that the miscreants had taken away Shyam Lal's 12-bore gun, which he always kept by his side and for which he held a licence. The make and number of the gun were ascertained from the licence by the Sub-Inspector. A careful search was made of Shyam Lal's *baithak*, from where he was supposed to have been spirited away on the night in question. A few bottles of country liquor, some full, some empty were recovered from the room, which proved that

an orgy of drinking must have taken place in it that night.

The woman who was kept in one of the outer rooms, no far from the *baithak*, had managed to free herself and escape to her own village, about ten miles away. It was said that she had been a witness to the crime at some stage, but was keeping her own counsel out of fear. We therefore decided to send for her and question her about the true facts of the case.

A young woman, stout of built, short of stature and plain of features, was brought in by the Sub-Inspector of Police. "Sir, this is a woman of a caste known as Beria. The Beria girls are from childhood initiated into the art of dancing and singing as part of the preparation for their future career of public women. This woman was kept by Shyam Lal and might be able to shed some light on the affair," the Sub-Inspector explained.

"Come on, young lady. Tell me how Shyam Lal was taken away from the *baithak* and by whom," I said, in an attempt to put her at ease.

"I do not know anything. At that time, I was asleep, fast asleep like this, and she closed her large eyes and put her palms on them. Multicoloured glass bangles jingled on her wrists and she presented a practised enticing smile, her pan-red lips revealing two gold-studded teeth.

"Behave properly. I know all your tricks. Tell the Saheb the truth," growled the Sub-Inspector.

"I told you I was asleep."

"How could you sleep when the tussle in the *baithak* was going on? Come on, out with the truth. I assure you that no harm will come to you," I said.

"Any assurance given by the police is only temporary. You will soon forget me," she again gesticulated with her fingers, eyes and lips.

"No, no, we will protect you. Now tell me, how long have you lived in Shyam Lal's house?"

"For about a year. Shyama (that was how she referred to Shyam Lal) at first used to visit me in my village. Then he got very fond of me and evidently could not bear the intervals of separation. He presented me with gold and silver ornaments. I felt happy. One day, he proposed that I should come over to his house and live permanently as his mistress. He agreed to make up for the loss that I would suffer in giving up my profession of dancing and singing," the woman now spoke without any reserve.

"So you abandoned your profession and turned into a respectable lady, the mistress of Shyam Lal?" interposed the Sub-Inspector.

"Yes. But I had to undergo untold suffering. I was practically put in prison. My ornaments were taken away and Shyama, who used to speak so softly before, changed his tone and tune, and at times even abused me. I was sorry about being kept away from my profession, the more so as the years of my youth were running out," she admitted candidly.

"No, no, your youth will last a lifetime," said the Sub-Inspector, in a very low tone, thinking I would not be able to hear him.

Still, I would not let it be noticed that I had heard anything and asked her: "If you were kept as a prisoner by Shyam Lal and if you were not happy, did you complain to anybody about his harsh attitude?"

"Once I did tell a band of boys who were playing near me. Till then, I had been free to move about. But one of those boys unwittingly told Shyama that I wished to go back to my village. Thereupon he locked me in that room. My fate was sealed."

"So you have not been very happy with life of late? And how could you be since Shyam Lal was a gambler and a drunkard?" I said.

"How do you know all that, saheb? Yes, you are right. Shyama would gamble till the late hours of the night and would also drink heavily. It was usually well past midnight when he unlocked my room, and then he

would pester me to no end. I would invariably fall asleep waiting for him after my eyes had tired of staring through that chink in the door for long hours at those gamblers," she gave out.

"So there was a chink in the door through which you could see all that went on in the *baithak*? Now, do not be afraid to tell the truth. What did you see that evening in the *baithak*? You are a good and truthful girl. I presume Shyam Lal was gambling with some of his friends there when you were in your room."

"Yes, he was gambling," she answered, and then stopped short.

"Oh, how truthful you are. Please tell me who were the friends of Shyam Lal gambling with him that evening."

"Friends? They were Shyama's arch-enemies. They befriended him only of late. Formerly, they would not even look at his face," exclaimed the Beria girl. "I told Shyama to be careful, but he would not pay any heed. You know, *saheb*, we women are also possessed of intuition and intelligence."

"Certainly, you are *boh* intelligent and truthful. Shyam Lal should have heeded the advice of his faithful mistress. Now come out! with the names of those who were gambling in the *baithak* that evening."

By this time, her attitude had softened. She gave the Sub-Inspector a triumphant glance not unmixed with fear, and then whispered: "First, promise that no harm will befall me."

"No harm will come to you. We will stand by you at all times. I will post policemen to guard and protect you. Moreover, our conversation here will remain a strict secret," I reassured her.

"Then, *saheb*, listen. Four Thakurs of this village, Dalel Singh, Krishnapal Singh, Jaipal Singh and Drigpal Singh, were often seen gambling with Shyama. Out of these, I had noted that Jaipal Singh and Drigpal Singh had been making efforts for several days past to have a private gambling session in Shyama's

baithak. They were trying to persuade him to agree and not let any other person come in during the game. For about a week, Shyama put off the proposal as he had other close friends to consider. On this day, however, most of his friends had gone to the market at Jaitpur. Jaipal Singh and Drigpal Singh came to Shyama at noon and were with him for a long time. I overheard their conversation. The proposal for a private gambling session that very day was put forward and was pressed by the two. Shyama at first did not agree, but when they brought out two bottles of liquor, he gave a broad smile and said: "Let me sleep at this hour. We can have the game in the evening. You must come then," the woman revealed, giving what was very valuable information.

"You are a marvellous lady," exclaimed the Sub-Inspector.

"Yes, she is very intelligent. Now please proceed and tell us what happened at the time of gambling."

"At nightfall, Jaipal Singh, Drigpal Singh, Dalel Singh and Krishnapal Singh came to the *baithak*. I know their names as, after living for about a year in the place, I had acquired some knowledge of the people and things in the village. Hurricane-lamps were lit, some bottles uncorked and eatables brought. After that, the gambling got into full swing. I felt sleepy and dozed off. I was given some delicious dishes to eat by Shyama prior to the session."

"When did the incident take place?" asked the Sub-Inspector.

"It was around midnight that I was startled in my sleep. There was some hurried movement and stamping of feet. And Shyama was heard to moan: "Save me! Save me!"

"Who will save you? Call your father to save you, you swine," said one of the attackers.

"I peeped through the chink. In the dim light, I saw Shyama being bodily lifted by eight or ten persons. They took him as people take a dead man.

Shyama could not speak. They quickly opened the door of the *baithak* and walked out with the body."

"This is interesting. But you said first that there were only four persons who came to gamble. How then did you see twice that number later on?"

"As I told you, I had gone to sleep. I do not know how so many persons came to be in the *baithak* when originally there had been only four. Probably, the forefathers of those Thakurs had descended from heaven as ghosts," she smiled, with a twinkle in her eye.

"What did you do then?" the Sub-Inspector asked.

"I was aghast. I could not do anything. The room of my door was locked from outside. I battered away at it, but no one heard my alarm. At last, I fell on the floor, weary with disgust, and lay there in a semi-conscious state. I was shaken up and my heart was beating fast. Early in the morning, some of Shyama's relatives opened the door and dragged me out. The members of the household hurled filthy abuse at me and I thereupon quietly slipped away. I hired an *ekka* and reached my village." She completed her story with a deep sigh.

This Beria woman had given us valuable clues in the case. Our main anxiety now was to trace Shyam Lal somehow.

The search operations in the Jamuna continued throughout the night under the supervision of a Sub-Inspector but they yielded no useful result. When we again reached the bank near Chandi Karar, the Sub-Inspector came to me, his eyes red through lack of sleep and his face drooping in despair. He muttered: "Sir, all the fishermen of the locality and all the good divers have been at work incessantly, but no trace of a human body has been found. We could, however, get two or three tortoises in the fishing-nets, but let them go. The boatmen say that a big crocodile has his habitation in the deep water below Chandi Karar, and that, if there were a human being in the water,

he would have certainly been devoured by the reptile."

"All right. You must be tired. Take rest now. Tell all those who were engaged in the search operations to break up for two hours and then reassemble here. I will attend to this myself.

The story of the crocodile added further complications to the problem. The curtain of darkness was lifting over the waters of the Jamuna in the morning sun, but our hopes had been blanketed by the failure to recover anything useful.

I walked away from Chandi Karar along the bank with the current of the river. My steps were faltering and my head was reeling. The rays of the sun seemed to burn my eyes. I sought an escape from the heat. At some distance was a solitary banyan tree, its boughs spread all round as though inviting me to its pleasant shade. I walked up to the tree and sat down on a boulder near its trunk. The riverbank was sandy all through, but the collection of these stones presented a strange sight. There may have existed some building, possibly a temple, at this spot in the years gone by. But now it was a heap of debris covered with moss and overgrown with vegetation.

I made myself comfortable under the tree and looked around. Suddenly, I noted that, at one point in the heap of debris, a few stones had been freshly removed. Some wet earth and broken creepers were visible at the spot from where the stones were missing.

I thought to myself that if Shyam Lal could not be found, I should make an effort at least to trace the missing stones. I, therefore, got up and walked towards the river. At this place, the sandy bank sloped gently into the water. Close to the water were strewn on the sand some small shells. The receding water had left them in a jumble there. My state of mind at this moment was such that anything of even slight interest could claim my attention. I, therefore, began picking up these shells and, lo! there lay a fired brass cartridge in that small heap.

I at once picked it up and looked at it closely. It appeared to be a fired case of .303 rifle cartridge. In my search among the stones, I had stumbled upon this interesting bit. Some fish were tossing at a distance in the water. I reflected that the whole thing appeared to be very fishy. I do not know how it flashed into my mind that I should get this portion of the river thoroughly searched but it appeared to be a line worth pursuing.

When the divers and fishermen reassembled after a short rest, the scene of search was shifted from Chandi Karar to the new area. The divers continued to dive deep in the water for an hour more, their bare bodies shining in the bright sun whenever they came up. At last from midstream, an old fisherman with white whiskers yelled loudly: "Saheb, can you hear me? My legs just struck a corpse which is lying heavy in the river-bed. Come on, come and take it out".

"What, a corpse? Whose corpse could it be?" I asked myself, and then ordered all the boatmen and divers to hasten to the spot. Ropes were lowered and the men plunged headlong into the depths of the river. After some time, they managed to recover the dead body of male. It was brought up to the sandy bank and we began examining it closely.

"The tortoises have feasted on part of the body; it appears to have been in the water for a long time. These stones were very heavy and it took the combined strength of ten men to drag the body up.

"You are a brave fellow," I congratulated the old man and then turned to look at the corpse. A few fairly large stones had been tied to it by means of ropes — they were obviously meant to serve as anchors to keep the body down in the bed. Half of the face and the right arm had been nibbled away by tortoises. The face was swollen and inflated beyond recognition and water oozed from the ears and nose.

There was a reddish-yellow scar on the left side of the chest. On examination, it was found to be the mark of some injury. When the head was lifted to

drain out the water, some hair from it came off easily in the hands of the man who held it. Some of the fishermen suspected that it was the body of Shyam Lal Brahman. I looked at the stones tied to the body. They were similar to those that were under the banyan tree. I at once concluded that it was definitely a case of murder in which the culprits had tried to obliterate all evidence of the crime by throwing the dead body into the river after tying stones to it.

The near relations of Shyam Lal were summoned from the village. They recognised the body as that of Shyam Lal. I preserved the hair that had come off its head and sent the corpse for an autopsy.

The autopsy revealed some very interesting facts. The ribs of the body were found to be fractured, the lungs and the heart punctured and a bullet embedded in the heart. We took possession of this bullet. It was established that the dead man was first murdered with a gun and then his body consigned to the river.

Now, at long last, the rays of hope were as bright as the midday sun. Our despair had yielded place to a sense of keen expectation.

The next step in the case was the arrest of the perpetrators of Shyam Lal's gruesome murder. The Beria woman had, in her statement, made a mention of the four Thakurs who were gambling in Shyam Lal's *baithak* that night. We organised raids immediately. Dalel Singh and Krishnapal Singh were arrested without much difficulty in their fields. Of the two brothers, the younger one, Jaipal Singh, locked himself in his house and his family members informed us that he had gone to another village. On hearing of the "discovery" at the river-bank, the elder brother, Drigpal Singh, the brain behind the conspiracy, had at once got his horse ready and galloped off to ask the other associates in the crime to take to their heels.

The Police surrounded the house of the two brothers and began a concerted search. When the time came to search a room in the upper storey of the house,

the womenfolk were reluctant to give the key to it. The Sub-Inspector thereupon threatened to burn down the house if the room was not opened, whereupon Jaipal Singh's mother threw a bunch of keys to him. When the room was opened, Jaipal Singh made a bold bid to escape with the help of a .303 rifle. He ventured to dash out, but was immediately caught. On his arrest, the womenfolk began weeping and wailing.

"Why are you all weeping?" I asked.

"Oh, saheb, my sons are now in trouble due to this girl. She is the root cause. Please let off my son and arrest this my daughter," pleaded Jaipal Singh's mother, pushing forward a good-looking girl of about 17 or 18.

"How is your daughter the cause of this trouble? Please explain in detail," I said.

"Come this side and listen to me. But promise that you will release my son Jaipal".

"I will see." So saying, I went with the old lady into another room.

"You appear to be kind and gentle. My son is also gentle. My daughter, as you see, is pretty. Shyam Lal took a fancy for her. Once, she was passing by his house, alone, during daytime. Shyam Lal came out of his *baithak*, caught hold of her arm and dragged her inside. He wanted to seduce her and spoke to her in soft tones: If you agree to be my mistress then I will patch up my differences with the Thakurs".

"That is impossible; let me go, otherwise I will cry out," my brave daughter retorted. She raised an alarm, freed herself, ran back to this house and narrated her tale of woe to her brothers. Both Jaipal and Drigpal, my two lion cubs, made up their minds to avenge the outrage, hence all this noise." All this was narrated by the old lady in some detail.

"But who actually murdered Shyam Lal?" I asked.

"That I don't know. But why are you after my sons? Please set them free," she pleaded again.

We now interrogated Jaipal Singh and examined the

rifle that had been recovered from his person. It was discovered that the .303 rifle was an unlicensed firearm which the two brothers had managed to get from Madhya Pradesh from an army unit, in which some of their close relations happened to be serving.

The conspiracy was now getting more broad-based and we had to extend the net of our investigation wide. At last, however, Jaipal Singh admitted that Shyam Lal's murder had been committed with the unlicensed rifle which had been bought for that very purpose. He also gave out the names of his other associates.

A number of Police parties were rushed to all the places where Drigpal Singh, the elder brother, was suspected to have gone. After some hide and seek, Drigpal was arrested in the house of one of his relatives, in a village on the banks of the Chambal. One by one, all the other persons connected with the crime were also apprehended.

Drigpal Singh in the end made a clean breast of everything. He stated that at first they planned to kidnap Shyam Lal as he had sought to disgrace his sister and as, moreover, they had a long-standing feud with him. They cunningly cultivated his friendship and for weeks humoured and flattered him. Their perseverance soon bore fruit and Shyam Lal began reposing some confidence in Drigpal.

On the fateful night, it was decided that the four Thakurs would start gambling in Shyam Lal's *baithak* and that, at about mid-night, they would be joined by four other associates who, on arrival, would pounce upon Shyam Lal and bundle him off by tying his hands and feet and gagging his mouth.

"The plan was executed with perfection except for the fact that Shyam Lal struggled for a while and, in the process, his head struck against the wall of the room, was injured and began bleeding," revealed Drigpal Singh. We, however, brought him out of the room and made him walk up to the river, hurling abuses at him for his misdeeds, but he remained quiet as a stone."

"But tell us how you murdered him? Now you have to speak the truth," I warned.

"Sir, you have already the rifle, the fired rifle cartridge and the dead body of Shyam Lal. You also know the facts. So let me tell you only the truth." Drigpal Singh heaved a sigh and continued: "It was with an effort that we covered the distance from Shyam Lal's house to the banyan tree on the banks of the Jamuna. It was a dark night and all was quiet. Under the banyan tree, Shyam Lal began rubbing his nose on the ground and making signs, begging for mercy. He could not speak as his mouth was gagged. He was showing symptoms of fatigue and seemed about to faint.

"The question arose that, if he fainted, what should we do. My friend, who hailed from a village on the Chambal bank pointed with a twitch of his lips to the rifle. He whispered: Finish him off and end it once for all."

"We agreed. Getting up, we walked down to the river on the sandy bank and made Shyam Lal stand in waist-deep water. He was drooping. I loaded the rifle and put one shot into his chest, and he tumbled down in the water. We then decided to tie heavy stones to the body and drown it in the river. Some of my friends brought the stones from under the banyan tree and we duly tied them to Shyam Lal's body. One shot had sufficed to finish him. With his end ended our long-standing feud. Now we are at your mercy."

We took the finger-prints of all the persons arrested by us. The blood-stained finger-marks which had been developed from the walls of Shyam Lal's sitting room were compared with these finger-prints. Two finger-prints of Jaipal Singh and of one other Thakur tallied with those marks. They later told us that, in the struggle, they held Shyam Lal by the head and that he made a supreme effort to free himself. He had already been bleeding. They supported themselves against the wall and their fingers got soiled in the blood and they tried to rub the blood against the wall.

The hair which had been recovered from the wall were found to be identical with the hair found on the head of Shyam Lal's body. This served as a good piece of evidence when the opinion of the expert was put forward in the court.

The fired cartridge and the bullet from the dead body were sent for ballistic tests along with the rifle recovered from the person of Jaipal Singh. The ballistic tests showed that the dent on the percussion cap of the cartridge tallied with the striker of the rifle. The recovered bullet was found to be of the same calibre as the rifle. It was also proved by firing another bullet from the .303 rifle on loose sand that the markings on the bullet were identical with the bullet recovered from the body. These two ballistic tests conclusively proved that the murder of Shyam Lal had been committed with that .303 rifle.

The investigation was vigorously pursued and the 12-bore gun belonging to Shyam Lal was also recovered from the search carried out in the house of a Thakur, an active member of the gang. With the recovery of this fire-arm, all the links in the chain of investigation had been connected.

The case was successfully prosecuted in court. The culprits were sentenced to terms of life imprisonment and the charge of conspiracy to murder Shyam Lal Brahman, was fully established. The feuds of the villagers led to this dastardly crime and the murmuring ripples of the Jamuna helped to conceal it — but only for a time.



Challenge of Bandit Chief

THE first momentary glimpse of Banjara Singh was through my powerful binoculars. He sat under a *babul* tree on the top of the hillock. His back was against its trunk. His rifle was held by his right hand between the knees. Bandouliers of ammunition were slung across his shoulders. His khaki turban was well tied on his head. He also held a binocular in his left hand and looked round through it. He must have observed me or some other policemen. He stood up, gripped his rifle tight and darted off down the valley. I beheld his manly figure — broad chest, lion-like waist, his *dhoti* tightly fitting his legs like breeches. He took long strides down the hillock. He did not come up again. He must have warned his compatriots, must have commanded them to a safe retreat. We could not establish contact with the gangsters. Our forces advanced. The enemy had disappeared through, gullies, pathways, ravines and bushes. He proved to be an alert commander.

On numerous occasions Banjara Singh's gang avoided direct confrontation with the Police. It chose to conserve ammunition and energy for profitable assaults. It, however, at times surprised a smaller, unwary police contingent or some stragglers, who strayed away from the main party. It inflicted losses on us, gnawed at our ranks, harassed us, and then disappeared. His strategy was mixed — that of a fox and a cat. Possessing intimate knowledge of the land, endowed with indomitable courage, devoted to singleness of purpose, adhering to certain codes of discipline and self-restraint, always watchful and nimble-footed, Banjara Singh and his gang ravaged the tract between Jamuna and Chambal rivers and beyond with ruthlessness to the rich and with benevolence to the poor. The main tactic of

this gang was 'hit and run'. This gang operated in the rugged country of ravines and hillocks of valleys and hidden paths, of scanty trees and thick thorny bushes, of shallow rivers and deep wells, of a few castle like brick buildings and of many mud-houses. Banjara Singh's band was composed of a few but dependent on the support of the many — the many who inhabited the mud-houses. He depended on the willingness of the people to aid his struggle against the rich and his vendetta against the Police. The basic element in his struggle was man — the man whom he led, and the man who was the object of his wrath.

I was Superintendent of Police, Agra District, at the time when the activities of this gang were at their height. Born and brought up in the rough tract of this district, my recollections lingered to the first shot fired through a muzzle loading gun in my boyhood. We boys used to watch with interest in the forenoons the process of molten lead taking the form of lead-balls in the moulds. I and my companions, at times, tinkered with fire and the pans over it, which were used for melting the lead. The lead was poured into the moulds and took the shape of smooth, round balls. We filled containers with dry gun powder, waited eagerly throughout the long-summer noon. In the late afternoons we gathered round the elders, who practised at target — shooting and begged of them to give us a chance. When our turn came, we had the gun tight to the shoulder, stopped the breath, and pressed the trigger. When the hammer hit the percussion cap on the nozzle of the muzzle-loading gun we blinked both our eyes at the loud report it produced. We bent forward and withstood the recoil on our young shoulders, little caring where the round ball had fled from the muzzle. The only thing we enjoyed was the smell of the burnt gunpowder. Little coils of smoke would rise from the nozzle and we would inhale them. That smell pervaded our being, we longed for it.

It had been the tradition of this tract of land

that all people, old and young would work hard, take care of themselves and of their fire-arms. Keep regular practice in firing and target shooting and be watchful at nights. They could exist there only by eternal vigilance. Little did I realize then, that I was, in future, destined to be pitched against one who had grown from the same soil, had drunk the same strength-giving cool water from the streams of the deep wells, and had been sustained on the grains grown on the same land.

The ravine lands of rivers Chambal and Yamuna are not only a peculiar feature of Uttar Pradesh, but have extended to bordering areas of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. This tract of land came to be known as 'bhadawar' comprising of Bah and Fatehabad subdivisions of Agra District, of portions of Bhind and Morena Districts of Madhya Pradesh and Raja Khera area of Dholpur Sub-Division of Rajasthan. The high terrain, through which these two rivers flow in low beds, has been denuded of top-soil, and washed away for centuries, leaving it intersected by innumerable ravines. These lands produced warriors and outlaws. For scholars they have provided material for study of socio-economic problems. For rulers they have been scenes of distractions and centres of defiance to authority.

The Muslim rulers of Lodi dynasty had to send their armies to deal with turbulent elements. Bahlol and Sikandar Lodi had to engage their troops repeatedly in this area. Historians Ferishta and Badouni mentioned these facts in their chronicles. This land attracted the notice of the first Mughal ruler, Babar, who mentioned in his memoirs about the turbulent tribes inhabiting this area. Some warriors of this land participated in the expeditions sent by Jahangir and Akbar. In, once famous fort of Hatkant, now in ruins, in Bah, Sub-Division, Akbar had to station strong

forces to curb the defiant local Raja. Inspite of this, he was constantly harassed both at Agra and Fatehpur Sikri. The rebellious elements rose and surprised his armies.

Some warriors of this area took part in the internecine wars between Dara Shikoh and Aurangzeb. After the break-up of the Mughal Empire, the Bhardauria rulers of this tract of land, in order to preserve their independence, put up resistance to the Marathas. A number of battles were fought with the Marathas on this land.

Attention of Warren Hastings and Lord Auckland remained engaged to the problems of bandits of this area. While the rulers remained preoccupied in subjugating this land, the defiant elements perfected their technique of banditry and harassment.

The result is that the stories of the ravines and rapine, plunder and ransom are interwoven. Some dacoit leaders developed new methods and new strategy. Some perfected counter-intelligence system. Some kidnapped wealthy persons and held them to ransom. Some worshipped the deities with humility, and deprived human beings of their lives and their possessions with cruelty. Thus nature and man both conspired to rob this little tract of land.

The stream of life is perennial The hardy tiller tills his land. The traveller trudges his path. The tardy lad tends the flocks The rich is in quest of more riches. The bandit is in search of the rich. The policeman pursues the bandit. And so the stories continue.

I should, therefore, revert to my story of Banjara Singh.

Banjara Singh had a chequered history. His father Chanchal Singh put him in the village school. As a boy, he struggled with alphabets, words and sentences. The old teacher dozed when the boys narrated their lessons. When his eyes would open he would find

half the class had stealthily walked out. Banjara Singh invariably led this team of truants. The teacher would box the ears of the truants. While others screamed, Banjara Singh only grinned, touched the feet of the teacher and promised to bring milk for him from his house. This practice of the old teacher continued so long as the defiant boy stayed in school. "We did not remember much of mother as she had died when we were young. Banjara Singh loved me and respected father. He didn't care for any one else in the world." So spoke the elder sister of Banjara once to me.

"Our father owned a flock of goats and sheep and some land. He cultivated the land while Banjara tended the flock. We were so happy. But alas! Those are now past dreams. My life is an unending misery stretching into eternity." Her misty eyes were wet and her hands were shaking as she uttered these words.

I learnt from some old men, of now forlorn village of Banjarpura, that the boy would drive his flock along with others in the undulated, arid land on the banks of river Chambal. The sheep and goats grazed on thorny bushes, the boys pricked the thorn of quarrels even with elders. Once they humbled a grown-up man in whose fields the flock had strayed. The boys brandished their *dandas* and shouted at him. "All our *dandas* put together are longer than your lathi and our leader Banjara on our shoulders is higher than you." This was a strange logic, but from that day Banjara Singh replaced his *danda* with a lathi. He brandished the lathi at his companions and ordered them not to keep company of goats and sheep too long. "If you remain there very long you will yourselves become idle like sheep. So play and be fearless."

As Banjara Singh developed into a sturdy youth, traits of boldness, courage and adventure showed in prominence in his character. He helped his old father

in the field and in household matters. He relieved him of many responsibilities on the occasion of his sister's marriage. But the main responsibility of financing the marriage worried both of them. Sheer hard work of the youth in the dry fields could not yield results. Monsoon had been failing year after year. Even coarse grain was getting scarce.

The old man's long-cherished dream of celebrating the marriage of his only daughter with some fanfare seemed to shatter. His will, however, was unflinching. He pawned half of his field. Sold the flock of sheep. Took loan from the *sahukar*. The daughter having gone after marriage, father and son were left to look after the weather-beaten tattered hut. Life continued, dreary and in scarcity.

The turning point in Banjara Singh's life was the death of his father. He disposed off the field to fulfill his duties as a devoted son in connection with the last rites of the dead. The *sahukar* turned up to press his demand for the payment of loan. Banjara Singh had no money to give. The *sahukar* remonstrated with abuses. The young man at first kept quiet but later retaliated by uttering abuses in reply. At this, the *sahukar* hit Banjara Singh with his stick. At the first touch of the stick, Banjara was wild and assaulted him with his lathi. The *sahukar* fled. That night Banjara Singh decided to leave his dilapidated house, and his semi-deserted village.

For some days he wandered on the rough land on the banks of river Chambal. He spent the nights beneath the starry sky. His path was uncharted. When the stock of grain that he carried dwindled he hit upon a plan. The evening was dark. He had settled under a banyan tree to spend the night. He saw at a distance a lone rider on a small pony. The rider had a gun slung on one shoulder and a belt of cartridges across his chest. Banjara Singh got up and

followed the rider at a distance. The gun tempted him. His first impulse was to possess it. His pace grew faster. As he, stealthily, got close behind the rider, he hit him with the lathi on the head.

"The blow was powerfully delivered. It was well aimed. My friend never missed his aim. He never dreaded the consequences. The rider reeled down. The possibility was there that the rider might have turned round and fired at Banjara. Brave acts involve risk. Only a born leader can take the risk and Banjara was at the rider repeating a number of blows till the latter lay unconscious." This was narrated by an old associate of Banjara Singh. Eyes of the narrator brightened as he spoke of many acts of valour of his chief. "That evening Banjara Singh relieved that man of his gun and belt of cartridges. Tried his first shot at the fallen rider. Killed him on the spot. Searched his pockets and got some money. Banjara Singh was now the proud horseman with a gun. From that night he was the tiger of the area."

Some of his old playmates joined him. Some others sought his company. Only those who came up to rigorous physical and other standards of the chief were admitted in the gang. Complete confidence in the leader, no molestation of women folk, no compunction in destroying human life, good marksmanship, burning hatred for the Police, insatiable lust for other man's wealth, were some of the essentials of his followers. The new recruits to the profession were watched, trained and tested. They were kept in outer concentric circles of the gang at first. Only a few formed the inner core, the centre being the leader.

Before long Banjara Singh had his revenge on the *sahukar*. In the words of one of his associates: "We raided his house one dark night, lightened him of his load of wealth. our chief put an end to his unholy life. A portion of the booty was kept for pious purpose — for marriages of sisters and daughters of the poor. Our leader's motto was 'Help the poor

and rob the rich'. How great was our leader and how detestable was the *sahukar*?"

So this process of robbing the rich continued with increasing frequency and mounting dastardliness. Instances came to notice where the gang exterminated entire families in cold blood and bolted with booty. In one case it shot dead first the grown-up son before the eyes of the old father to press the persistent demand for the keys of the safe. When the old man had surrendered the keys and when the contents of the safe had been taken, he too was put up against the wall and shot. The gangsters giggled and laughed while the ladies of the house wailed.

The latest case in the chain of crime was a double murder of two rich inhabitants of a village, who had prosperous business at Calcutta and who had come to perform the marriage of their sisters.

"Sir! Banjara Singh's gang extorted information of jewellery and gold from the two brothers. Dug out all the wealth at their pointing and then shot them in cold blood," spoke the Police Inspector to me as we were driving in a jeep to the scene of this occurrence.

"Something will have to be done," I had replied, still undecided. From a distance we could see three big brick houses in a multitude of mud-houses. They were three storeys high. One of them had been the scene of crime. Three brothers owned these houses. The eldest brother lived in one of the house with his mother. He managed the landed property and had business of money-lending. The two brothers stayed at Calcutta. The whole family had assembled on the occasion of the marriage. In a week's time the *barat* was to come.

"Instead of the *barat*, Banjara Singh's gang came. It brought untold misery and suffering in its wake to us," wailed the eldest brother to me. "Sir! I am left helpless and miserable. I escaped. My two brothers got in their clutches. They assaulted and insulted them. They scotched them. They burnt their fingers. They broke the safe and dug out all our wealth. My brothers

cried. The dacoit leader was angry. He bade the gangsters to silence the crying dogs. My brothers were shot and were silenced for ever. I am dazed. I am broken. Please help me, protect me." He could not utter a word more. He broke down.

I learnt from the villagers more details of this crime. The gangsters came stealthily in the dark night. Posted four watchers with fire-arms on four corners of the roof of the house. The gangsters shouted, flashed torches and fired. Every body ran for his life. The dacoits acted quickly. Gathered wealth from safe, and disgorged the buried treasure. The total loss of property in this case was of the value of Rs. 60,000/-.

Before the village Pradhan could muster up resistance of the villagers to the dacoits, they left.

"Sir, it was a windy night. The reports of guns and shouting of men were blown away in the opposite direction by the strong wind. I heard them later. My house is in that far corner. Had I known of this earlier, we would have slain some of those badmashes here," spoke the village Pradhan fixing his strong lathi to the ground. "They have spilled the blood of some of us. We'll avenge it before long."

It was early winter. A big mela is held every year at village Bateshwar in Police Circles Bah on Kartiki-Purnamashi. According to an old myth the direction of flow of the waters of river Yamuna was diverted at this village by one of the Rajas. A row of temples of Lord Shiva were constructed along the bank of the river. The devout come for worship. An extensive cattle-market is held in the vast area. People congregate in large numbers. Police contingents are drafted from Agra for arrangements.

We had secret information that the gangsters will not let slip this opportunity. When the village-folk would move to the mela, the criminals will strike. Where and when they will strike, we did not know.

We, therefore, moved well-equipped Police force this time to the mela. I was also in camp.

The main festival passed off without event. Population of the mela was thinning. Shop-keepers were winding up their business. Camels, horses, and bullocks were on move raising clouds of dust. Five days passed. We also began packing up. Late in the evening news was brought that the gang was to assemble near about midnight in a grove five miles away and thereafter was to commit dacoity at some rich man's house.

A meeting of my officers was quickly summoned. We decided our strategy, the main feature of which was to pretend to ignore this information and move on the road to Agra according to our original plan, take to a diversion road in the way, leave the vehicles at a distance and move the forces on foot quickly and encircle the grove, tightening our grip securely and secretly. Speed was the main factor. We decided on the 'pass word' and hurriedly instructed our men. Arms and ammunition were checked.

We drove the Police vehicles fast on the Agra road. Word had already gone round in the public that the police arrangements for the mela had been wound up. Everybody was keen to leave the ground early. At the spots already decided, our men alighted from the vehicles and marched on foot quietly. All of them had rubber and canvas jungle boots. They took long detours, spread out, watched for the ever vigilant enemy, and advanced. Each one of them was to be their own leader and guide but contact with one another had to be kept. They were to take position and wait for the signal of the Commander. Care had been taken to give covering fire to those who advanced. Armed units with high fire power were to take positions behind available cover on the ground. I had two Sections of Riflemen with me, some of whom carried grenades. We took position behind an old brick boundary wall around some plantation.

Our men were stealthily crawling forward. Pathways were kept clear but were within the range of rifles. The gang of dacoits was assembling inside the thick grove near a pucca well. Some of the members had reached there and were waiting for others to join. They were constantly watchful. Some village men moved towards the grove not knowing the presence of the Police Force, which was still far away from the grove and the well.

Suddenly noises rose from the eastern outskirts of the grove followed by repeated gun shots. There was exchange of fire and a flutter among the gangsters. They ran out of the grove. Police fired very light pistols. In the momentary glare the policemen advanced and shot at the fleeing dacoits who retaliated. Firing of very light pistol was the signal for assault. There was confusion for some time. We later learnt of a sudden skirmish between the advancing Police party and some of the gangsters who were on their way.

In the darkness of night, bullets whizzed. They hit the trunk of trees. They rustled through the leaves. Excitement ran high, taking cover behind rising ground, earth mounds, and tree-trunks the Policemen pressed the assault. The gangsters continued firing shots from near the well at the men. Some hit the brick wall behind which I and my two sections had taken cover. My riflemen were craving for revenge. They were agitated, ready to fire off the ammunition. They had to be kept under control and firing by them had to be regulated. It appeared that some of the dacoits had escaped, but some were hitting at us, from the grove. At times they yelled and hurled abuses on us, thus, "Ye Police Dogs! run away for your lives, or you'll be killed. We are well armed." The Policemen stuck to the ground bravely.

Exchange of fire continued throughout the night. Casualties on our side had occurred. But the ring

round the grove had tightened. The main body of the gang had been pinned down near the well. In the first light of dawn we realised the actual position. Close to the well was a brick-built room. It had one door facing the western side, one window on the southern side. The northern side of the wall had no opening. The gang had entrenched itself inside this room and was firing at us on the three sides through the door and windows. Dry hay was stocked on the roof of the room. During the night the leader of the desperado, at times, was directing operations against us in the cover of stock of hay and also shouted full-throated abuses at us.

In the morning we decided to pin down the gangsters to the room at first, then attempt to drive them to the open ground and deal with them. The final assault was to be pressed from the north side. It had been a pitched battle throughout the night. It was not known how long it would last.

Suddenly repeated shots were directed by the gang at me and my force from the door on the Western side. We ducked below the brick wall, which was our cover. I decided to use the grenades. The riflemen who carried the grenades were ordered to fire them at the roof top of the room. Two grenades missed the aim and fell beyond and burst. The third rifleman was more accurate. The grenade landed on the roof of the room, exploded with a loud report and set fire to the hay stack. Fire leapt up into flames. A fourth grenade exploded near the door on the western side. The room must have got too hot inside. The desperadoes ran out in utter desperation still holding their guns and firing. As they emerged, rifle shots rent the air from all sides. My one section of riflemen, took unfailing aim and fired. Five gangsters fell, curled and lay dead not far from one another. The sixth one who had managed to run for some distance was also shot.

It was now all quiet. The Police force rose. It had endured bravely the nerve-racking strain throughout

the night. The dead bodies of dacoits were found riddled with bullets. The dacoit-leader Banjara Singh lay fallen and dead. On the Police side, we lost one Head constable and two constables. Two more constables were injured. The remnants of the dacoits who had escaped earlier were rounded up later.

We had reached Bah by evening. Sun was setting. Pale streaks of light on the Western horizon were sinking in darkness.

The elder sister of Banjara Singh arrived as we were preparing to move to Agra. She insisted to see the dead body of her brother. She tied a red thread to the broad wrist of the dead Banjara Singh. She then applied a red mark on his forehead and sobbed, "This is my last Rakhi to my dear brother".

Her eyes brimmed with tears. The many wrinkles on her face hid her misery deep in their furrows. She kept looking at his face. She sighed deeply and could only speak, "This is my last request. Please mingle the ashes of my brother in the waters of Chambal. Many more brave men like him will rise from the dust of this valley."

Poppy-heads and starred axe

THE rose-pink hue of the dawn was gradually deepening into a scarlet-red. The sun was peeping over a cluster of green trees that March morning. The red building of Kokhraj Police Station, in Allahabad district, was bathed in bright orange hues. The birds had ceased chirping.

Suddenly, the wailing and weeping of some villagers brought the policemen on duty up with a start. A plump Mahajan came forward. He had an injury on his head and streaks of blood flowed down his forehead and face onto his kurta. His lips quivered in nervousness under shaggy moustaches. Two ladies, screaming and wailing, followed the fat man.

"What is the matter? What brings you here?" enquired the Sub-Inspector in charge of the station.

"We are ruined. We have been robbed. Please save us, Darogaji," moaned the fat man.

"We have been relieved of all our ornaments and cash; See... see what the dacoits have done to us. Please do trace our lost property." The two ladies wept, displaying their bare necks and arms.

"Have patience," counselled the Sub-Inspector. "First let's have the facts of the incident."

Lala Ram Gopal, the complainant in the case, proceeded to narrate the details of the dacoity that had taken place at his house in Alamchand village, in Police Circle, Kokhraj. A well-armed gang of dacoits, he said, randed his house around midnight compelling him to open the main door. Ram Gopal, who was sleeping in the courtyard, ran into one of the rooms for safety. In the meantime, some of the dacoits climbed the tiled roof and some others battered away at the main door with axes, succeeding in breaking it open.

Suddenly, the miscreants gathered in the court-

yard and fired a few rounds from the fire-arms that they carried with them to scare away the villagers. They dragged out Ram Gopal, his wife and sister-in-law, and abused, threatened and even manhandled them. Ram Gopal was dealt a lathi blow on his head, whereupon he surrendered the keys of his safe and cloth shop. The miscreants then took out all the cash and ornaments from the iron safe, forced both the ladies present to part with the jewellery on their person, and selected some choice pieces of cloth from the shop. They made bundles of the booty and, shouting and howling, left the house and the village in a hilarious mood. Those heavy bundles had induced a feeling of light-heartedness in them, while Lala Ram Gopal, rendered literally light by this stroke of misfortune, began feeling heavy of heart. For his life's earnings had vanished in a matter of moments. He wished that the dacoits had taken him, too, with the property, so that he could have feasted his eyes on his hard-earned wealth for at least some time more. Now his life was bare as a desert and he felt listless like a tree shorn of its foliage.

The Station Officer listened sympathetically to Ram Gopal's tale of woe and tried to reassure him, getting the report placed on the police records. He then put on his uniform and, with some members of his staff, accompanied the aggrieved persons to Alamchand. This village, situated on a ridge not very far from the right bank of the river Ganga, commanded a very strategic position. There was no way of retreat from the place on the northern side as the sloping ground merged into the banks of the river. The southern side, however, was connected by a kutchra road and a number of winding paths with other villages of the neighbourhood. At a distance of about four to five miles in the southern direction ran the Grand Trunk Road, on which the traffic was invariably heavy.

One narrow road cut the village into two portions along the east-west direction and here were some shops. This was the market-place of Alamchand village and,

almost in its middle, was situated the house of Lala Ram Gopal. The main door of the house and the entrance to the cloth shop were in front of the narrow road, while one other door opened out on the back of the courtyard, on the southern side. The large house, pucca at some places and kutchha at others, had mostly tiled roof. Its extensiveness was indicative of Lala Ram Gopal's prosperity.

"Now, Lalaji, tell me all about the case, so that we may have an on-the-spot assessment of the situation," said the Sub-Inspector.

"Come on, come with me. You are our saviour and protector. See this safe that was opened by the dacoits — it contained gold and silver ornaments thousands and thousands of rupees worth. What a fool I was to surrender the keys to them. They took away my dearest possessions in my presence; I am ruined... totally ruined!" Lalaji was obviously upset and a few drops of tears rolled down his fleshy cheeks.

"Don't cry now. Tell me, how did you come to possess so much wealth?"

"I am also a money-lender and people used to pawn their ornaments at my shop. I would keep their valuables in this safe here. The cloth shop was only a side business," Ram Gopal revealed.

"So you charged heavy interest from those who borrowed money from you? And that, perhaps, was the secret of your prosperity. Now refresh your memory and tell me if any strangers came to your shop to purchase cloth, or to borrow money recently."

"You are very good, Darogaji. You know money cannot be earned by straight methods — one has to be clever and resourceful to amass wealth. But let me recollect now..." Lalaji paused for a while and raised his eyebrows. He seemed to gaze into vacant space for a while and then spoke, in a low tone: "You see, Darogaji, I have no dealings with strangers. I don't think any person I did not know visited my shop recently."

"Your reply is not quite satisfactory. Think over

and then answer."

"Oh yes, I remember now." Ram Gopal paused a while and then continued: "On the last market-day, a couple of fellows from a far-off village had come to sell grain. I purchased some grain from them and one of them laughed and said: 'Lalaji, you have a prosperous tummy. This grain will not last you very long.'"

I simply smiled, whereupon his other companion made enquiries about this large building. When I told him that I was its owner, displaying an ill-formed set of teeth under twisted moustaches he remarked: "This Lala is both fat and rich and lives in a palatial building. How lucky he is."

On enquiry by the Sub-Inspector, Lalaji could furnish only a rough description of the traders. The Sub-Inspector then went closely over the scene of the crime. It was found that the intruders had left behind a small bundle of cloth, containing some poppy-heads and one large size steel axe fitted with a wooden handle. They had evidently stayed at the house for a short while only, having done a quick job in committing the dacoity. Even those in the village holding arms licenses either did not get much time or had not been able to muster enough courage to reach the spot and offer resistance.

The Sub-Inspector of Police Station, Kokhraj, was not able to get any help or clue from the village folk here in unravelling the mystery of the case. On the other hand, the villagers gave different versions of the path of retreat taken by the dacoits. Some made out that the miscreants had escaped across the Ganga, others conjectured that they must have gone by bus or truck to Allahabad, while a few thought that they must be hiding in some village nearby. The only two items which repeatedly attracted the attention of the Investigating officer were the bundle of poppy-heads and the steel axe. He now proceeded to examine them more closely. The poppy-heads had been tied in a dirty piece of pink cotton cloth with a border along one end,

indicating that it had been torn from a dhoti of rough texture.

When the large axe was minutely inspected, it was discovered that it had a small star engraved on it. The handle was of ordinary wood, available in abundance in the locality. The Sub-Inspector gazed at the lines of this star, but the mystery of the episode continued to remain unfathomable and inexplicable. In the end, the Investigating officer decided to compile two lists – one of persons addicted to the smoking of poppy-heads, the other of persons in the neighbourhood engaged in the task of felling and cutting trees.

When summoned, the poppy-head smokers, coughing and trembling, recounted their own experiences of the doping effect of the leaf, but could not shed any light on even a single aspect of the dacoity. "We are a non-aggressive class of people who weave our dreams on the starry firmament. We are intellectuals in our own way. Why should we commit this crude crime of dacoity? Darogaji, please arrange for some poppy-heads for us and then watch our poetic imagery," said one old addict, leaning against the wall and coughing as he spoke.

"You are all a pack of fools," burst out the Sub-Inspector, in disgust.

Next came the turn of those hefty fellows called upon to use the steel axe in their daily pursuit. With some difficulty, it was established that an axe similar to the one recovered had been manufactured by an iron-smith of Mahagaon village, in a neighbouring Police Circle. One Lalloo Gadariya, who used to fell trees, had an axe of a similar type with a star mark on it.

"From where did you get this axe?" asked the Sub-Inspector.

"From Ganja Lohar of Mahagaon village who is the main manufacturer of steel axes in that region. His forefathers supplied axes to my forefathers. Thus our families have been linked through generations."

This set the Sub-Inspector thinking and, he got

Ganja Lohar to come over right away from his village.

"Sir, this steel-axe is the product of my handiwork. I inscribe my mark, which is a star, on every axe I produce. You know, all big factories mark their goods," Ganja Lohar smiled broadly.

"Can you recall to whom you sold it and when?"

"That is difficult to tell. Things made of steel last very long, and then my goods are all quality goods. They would last a lifetime," chattered Ganja.

"You are inclined to talk too much," admonished the Sub-Inspector.

"Darogaji, all traders must talk, and that, too, sweetly in the interest of their business."

"All right, all right. That will do," said the Sub-Inspector, leaning back in his chair. He was getting exasperated over the bleak prospects of working the case to a satisfactory conclusion. "I will make another supreme effort," he said to himself.

After pausing for a while, it occurred to him that he should once again interrogate all those who wielded these heavy axes and who were engaged in cutting wood or felling trees. One by one, these men were asked to appear before him. The Sub-Inspector's perseverance was rewarded when one Tek Chand gave out that, a year back, a large-size steel axe, belonging to Ram Das, fellow worker of his, had been stolen when the two of them had been engaged in felling the trees of a grove belonging to Manku Miyan. It was suspected that one Ghissan, who used to work with them, had taken it as Manku Miyan had not paid a day's wages to the man. Ghissan had not turned up for work thereafter and no trace of Ram Das's axe could be found. On further enquiry, it emerged that Ghissan belonged to a village not very far from Alamchand.

The Kokhraj Police immediately had enquiries made in Ghissan's village, whereupon his old uncle, in a shaky voice, said: "Sarkar, Ghissan has been away from this house for the last eight months. He went

to Bombay to earn a living as he was not getting sufficient wages here."

When questioned about the steel axe, the old man gave out that one of his distant relatives, named Rajjab Ali, had borrowed it from him about a week back. On checking up with Rajjab Ali, it was found that another person, named Bulaqi Ram, had taken the axe from him for some urgent private work. Bulaqi Ram was a resident of a village about twenty miles away, in another Police Circle. Now the Steel axe was obviously the sheet-anchor, of the case, so a vigorous search was launched for Bulaqi Ram.

First, the Police raided his house, but it was found that only his wife was in and that Bulaqi Ram had gone, two days back, to his son-in-law's place, situated in another village about thirty miles away. However, in the course of the house search, a big earthen pot filled with poppy-heads was recovered from one of the rooms. Some pieces of expensive cloth were also found, but these had not as much value for the police as did a piece of dirty dhoti, pink in colour. Some food-grains had been kept tied in this piece of dhoti, lying in a corner of the room.

When the Station Officer of Kokhraj examined the dhoti piece closely, he found that it resembled exactly the one recovered on the scene of the dacoity, in Alamchand village, with poppy-heads in it. When the dhoti piece found in the house of Bulaqi Ram was spread out, it was noted that a strip had been torn from it and that its black flowery border was exactly similar to that of the piece already in the police's possession. In fact, that piece of cloth was complementary to this, for when placed side by side, the two made up the full dhoti.

This was most valuable piece of evidence, so the Sub-Inspector followed up the clues vigorously. Enquiry made of Bulaqi Ram's wife revealed that he was addicted to the smoking of poppy-heads, that this was the reason an earthen pot full of the stuff had

always been kept in his house.

Now the search for Bulaqi Ram started in right earnest. The police party, headed by the Sub-Inspector, reached the village in which Bulaqi Ram's son-in-law resided and raided his house. Bulaqi Ram was arrested there and his son-in-law at once came out with the truth in order to escape further disgrace. He produced a bundle of rich silk and another of satin, all of different colours, which, he said, had been brought by Bulaqi Ram for purposes of selling in the village. The son-in-law, his hand on his head, moaned: "Darogaji, I did not know that my father-in-law was dealing in stolen property."

It transpired that Bulaqi Ram had told him that he had embarked on a new business of selling cloth and that he had brought a rich collection for displaying his wares to buyers in the village. "Now you can take the entire bundle of clothes and also my father-in-law with you, but please don't disgrace me any further," he finally pleaded.

"All right, take it easy. Since you appear to be telling the truth, we won't trouble you any more. But I will have to take your father-in-law with me," replied the Sub-Inspector, his eyes aglimmer. For now, at long last, it looked as though the case was bursting wide open.

Further investigation revealed that the wares recovered from the possession of Bulaqi Ram were in every respect the same as those stolen from the house of Ram Gopal Bania, in Alamchand village. Bulaqi Ram was a man of ordinary status, a resident of Parsara village. He was aged about 55, had a long thin face, and was of medium height and frail of build. He had unusually large eyes in which the dreamy looks of a habitual poppy-smoker were always reflected. Smoking of poppy-heads was with him not merely a hobby — it was a necessity, so much so he could go without meals, but not without poppy-heads. He felt his head to be as high as a king's when he sensed the pleasant odour

of smoke rising from poppy-heads. The curly smoke rings raised his spirits to the skies and he felt light as a sparrow and would dream of angels and fairies. It was very easy for the police to interrogate this smoker of poppy-heads.

Bulaqi Ram came out with the full story of the case. He disclosed that, about a fortnight prior to the dacoity, he had gone to the bazar of Ajuwa village to purchase some foodgrains as well as some poppy-heads. There he met Prakash Chandra and Krishan Prasad, who were residents of the Fatehpur district. Both of them were old friends of his, being like him addicted to the smoking of poppy-heads. After making purchases from the bazar, the three of them repaired to a secluded spot to smoke poppy-heads. In the course of conversation, they invited Bulaqi Ram to visit their home town Khakhreru, in the Fatehpur district. These two persons had previously come to Alamchand village for selling grains and their discerning eyes had fallen on the palatial house of Lala Ram Gopal.

When he went to Khakhreru, they put up a proposal to Bulaqi Ram to join them in committing a dacoity at the house of Lala Ram Gopal. It was left to Bulaqi Ram to arrange for a strong steel axe for breaking open the doors of the house, in case this was found necessary. Prakash Chandra and Krishan Prasad took it upon themselves to arrange for fire-arms and for eight other men to join them in the dacoity.

On the appointed day, the gang assembled not far from Alamchand village and committed the dacoity with the utmost speed and dispatch. All the members of the gang were notorious bad characters who carried out robberies and dacoities in the districts of Allahabad and Fatehpur, their gang consisting of members from both these regions.

This information was sufficient for those at Police Station, Kokhraj, to work the case to an eminently satisfactory conclusion. The Station Officer at Kokhraj went on to arrest all the members of the gang and recover

almost all the stolen property — consisting of cash, ornaments and clothes — from searches carried out on the houses of those accused.

The credit for the successful investigation and prosecution of the case mainly rested on the Kokhraj Police but the part played by the starred steel axe is not to be brushed aside lightly. For it was this axe that provided the clues which enabled the police to solve the case. All the accused in the case were sent to stand their trial and were convicted to ten year's R. I. each. The poppy-heads and the starred axe had betrayed them badly.

Gold-diggers gaoled

IT was an evening in Phagun that wore a strange hue, filling one with a sense of euphoria. The setting sun lent to the distant blue horizon a crimson glow, and it seemed as though the minarets of Khusro Bagh, in Allahabad, were fringed with gold.

In the shady nook of a minaret sat a group of men, conspiring together, in huddled whispers. Whether they had eyes for the glory of the scene or were only waiting for the approach of nightfall, there was no way of knowing.

The evening grew murky and soon the figures of the men huddling together were lost in the dark. A chill gradually crept into the pleasant evening air and, not long after, it was pitch dark everywhere. Khusro Bagh bore a deserted look though the traffic to and from the railway station continued unabated.

It was the midnight hour of February 23, 1953, when the passengers, some of them half-asleep, reclined against their baggage. Some others were lost in slumber on the benches of the platform of Allahabad railway station. There were still others who, trying to fight the urge to doze off, periodically lifted their drowsy eyes to look at the platform clock.

Suddenly, the bell rang, shaking all of them to a sudden alertness. And, a little while later, the flashing light of the engine tearing through the darkness created a stir in the ranks of the dozing crowd. While one of them lifted up his bundle, another took up his box, and still another took his bag in his hand. Even at that hour of midnight, there was to be seen an awakening and activity akin to that at morning.

The Parcel Express bound for Howrah from Delhi had reached Allahabad Junction. The Parcel Babu took out three sealed packages from the iron safe in his

office and got them put in the brake van in his presence. These packages contained gold bars worth Rs. 1,51,000. The guard of the train took special precautions to keep them safe and put an E. P. lock (a type that cannot be easily opened) on the van. Thereafter, the brake van was taken to the yard for shunting, and, after about fifteen minutes, it was again attached to the train. The Parcel Express left Allahabad junction at the scheduled time.

The train stopped, as usual, at Vindhyachal Station. The guard left his compartment to go to the Station Master's Office and, while doing so, cast a look in the direction of the brake-van. He was stunned to find that the E. P. lock of the brake-van was open. Even the doors of the van seemed to be loosely shut. Instinctively sensing foul play, he promptly got in touch with the Station Master, Vindhyachal, and the Government Railway Police.

The train was scheduled to stop at that Station for just two minutes. Dark as it was all round, it was not possible for the guard to look into the matter there and then, so he decided to carry out an inspection at the next station.

When the train stopped next at Mirzapur, the guard got down and began to tally the number of parcels in the van with his list, in the presence of the railway staff and the Government railway police personnel. To their great surprise, it was discovered that the three packages containing gold bars were missing. They were all aghast. The disappearance of the packages from such a fast-running Express train between Allahabad and Vindhyachal was, to say the least, surprising indeed. It was as though the packages had taken wings to vanish into thin air.

The investigation of this strange incident was taken in hand by the Inspectors of the Government Railway Police, Mirzapur and Allahabad. They received full co-operation from the local police of the stations. The first things to be ascertained was the actual scene of

the crime. It was really a mystery where and how this theft between Allahabad and Vindhyachal could take place. To that end, a thorough search of the area adjoining the tracks between the two stations was undertaken. But, in spite of an inch-to-inch search of the deep gorges, rising mounds and clusters of bushes in the Vindhya ranges, nothing worthwhile could be known. The only thing that came to light was that there were on some gold bars the India Government's Ashoka emblem, and on others the seal of the Bank of Bikaner.

In the course of investigations, the Station Officer of the Allahabad Railway Police was led to suspect the complicity of the railway staff in the affair. "How is it possible that the thieves could pick out of those large numbers of parcels only those three that contained the gold bars," he asked. "How is that no other parcel was even touched or tampered with?"

"But this is not the only line on which we have to base our investigations," the Inspector pointed out, his fingers playing with the ends of his bushy moustache and his eyes shining with shrewd experience. "Assuming that the railway people had passed on information about the contents of the packages to the culprits, by such a conjecture or knowledge alone no useful purpose is served. Our main task is to find out who the culprits are, and then the mystery of the whereabouts of the gold bars may be solved."

The Investigating Officers heard this and fell into deep thought. None of them could suggest a positive line of action. What was to be done? How to proceed in the matter? These disturbing queries hovered in their minds like dark clouds, without a ray of hope flashing through.

There was an unrelieved spell of silence until the Inspector spoke up again: "To begin with, we must draw up a list of the habitual railway thieves and then proceed to carry out a check-up on them, as also on their companions, friends and relations."

The suggestion was warmly taken up by all, and the process of enquiry was set into motion. However, the suspicion of the Station Officer that the railway staff must have had foreknowledge of the matter, was found not to hold water, the District Police Allahabad having acted in the affair with great alacrity.

One day, the City Police learnt through a very reliable source that, only a day before, a poor man, a Pasi by caste, had celebrated the birth of a son to him with great pomp. The celebrations had included dance and music, and the dancing and singing parties had been rewarded with gold pieces. Further investigation was carried out to assess the financial position of that Pasi, and the police, after proper enquiry, had every reason to conclude that the sudden prosperity of the man was the outcome of some foul gains. The tempo of the investigation was, therefore, further intensified and, as a result, certain facts came to light which proved that that Pasi had association with a set of bad characters who were professional railway thieves.

The other side of the investigation was pursued by the Railway Police officials who had drawn up a list of persons who habitually committed thefts in trains. Constables were deputed at various points and information was gathered through them. But no conclusive proof could be gathered. The Police officials kept themselves briskly busy, but their labours bore no fruit, with the result that disappointment hung heavy.

Then one day, a Police constable in plain clothes overheard the conversation of some women gathering burnt cinder in the railway yard. One of them was telling the others how she had seen a lot of gold at the house of one of her relations. These women were employed by a contractor to gather cinder dropped by Engines. The constable listened to them discreetly. He then tried to put some simple questions to them, but they would not say anything more. On the other hand his queries seemed to so alarm them that they instantly shut up like clams.

The constable, alert in duty, at once produced them before the Station Officer. A vigorous investigation was launched and, after some effort, the women were made to reveal the location of the house in which they had seen the gold pieces in question. That house was from then kept on under constant surveillance by constables in plain clothes.

When the Police investigation assumed greater momentum and detailed enquiries began to be made, there came a day when one Nanku appeared on his own before the City Magistrate and prayed to be sent to jail as the Police were after him. This was a strange request and it alerted the Investigating Official all the more. In a similar way, another notorious railway thief, one Sunder, surrendered himself to the Magistrate and his request to be sent to jail was likewise granted.

Investigations had revealed that Nanku and Sunder belonged to a gang of railway thieves whose leader was one Ramnath, a man of great criminal notoriety. Now the Investigating Officers realised with concern that, if they did not solve the case soon, all the members of the gang would, one by one, surrender themselves to the Magistrate, and they would lose the chance to investigate the crime. So they decided to take fresh stock of the situation. They determined to speed up the process of enquiry and to carry out an immediate search of those houses in which the gold was said to be stocked.

The Police raided these houses and made systematic searches there. From the house to which those women collecting cinder in the railway yard had directed the Police, a big slab of gold was recovered, and it bore the seal of the Bank of Bikaner. The house belonged to a relation of Sunder, and the latter being in jail, his mother was interrogated. The old woman proceeded to reveal certain facts which at last served to establish a link in the process of investigation.

The house of that Pasi in which celebrations had

been held was also searched and a few pieces of gold were dug out from where they had been buried. On some of these were found the seal of the India Government.

It was thus established that most of the miscreants belonged to the district of Allahabad. One after another, the persons involved in the crime were apprehended. The knowledge that the Police had got possession of a part of the stolen gold demoralised them so completely as to render it virtually impossible for them to present a bold front when charged with the crime. It was, therefore, not long before they made a clean breast of things.

Now that the true facts of the case are known, it is interesting to reflect on the daring manner in which the crime was committed. For, fact though it is, it reads verily like a tale of pure fancy.

It was the last phase of winter and Phagun brought with it a sense of overwhelming relief. The more thought of the colourful season was invigorating. It was Holi eve and the crimson hue of the vermillion seemed to fill the minds and hearts of the members of that criminal gang with boundless zest and enthusiasm. Spring was truly in the air and the eyes of those gathered around were red with the intoxication of wine. All of them resolved to win a big prize this time. Holi was to be celebrated with perfect pomp.

They were all well-versed in the art of committing thefts in trains. Their vigilant eyes kept roving about the railway yard, the platform, the parcel office and the wagons for some valuable treasure. One day, by chance, they came to know about those packages of gold. They also learnt that these valuable parcels were being sent to Calcutta by the Parcel Express.

Naturally, they lost no time in drawing up a scheme for the speedy removal of those packages from the train. One of them managed to secure a key to the E.P. lock and he planned to get it open. As soon as these parcels were put in the brake-van of the Parcel

Express, Ramnath, the leader of the gang, determined not to let go the "golden" opportunity. Along with him, he chose three of the more dextrous and determined members of the gang for the task. These were: Shambhu, Sunder and Nanku.

They then purchased four third class tickets for Mirzapur. As the train steamed out of Allahabad junction, the four of them occupied a third class compartment adjacent to the brake-van in which the packages of gold were kept. The train stopped for a minute or two at the Jamuna Bridge, the caution signal having been given. This was the moment they had been waiting for. Ramnath and Shambhu stealthily slipped out of the compartment. Ramnath balanced himself on the buffer of the brake-van and Shambhu adjusted himself between the iron frame near the wheels. The Express train now gathered speed.

Shambhu, in the course of his confession, gave out the details thus: "When the Parcel Express was speeding towards Vindhyachal, both Ramnath and myself decided to finish the job quickly. Every moment was precious and no time was to be lost. Both of us got out and climbed on to the roof of the brake-van. There were cold dew-drops spread over the roof and this made the going slippery. And then the rattling of the carriage-wheels, the slapping gusts of the smoke and steam emanating from the engine, the disconcerting jerks at the joints of the railway track — all this added to our difficulties. The slightest slip would result in shattered bones. We, therefore, held fast to the small domelike thing on the roof of the van. This was its ventilator and, perhaps, through it passed the electric wires as well. I twisted my legs around that dome in a tight grip and, by holding Ramnath by his ankle enabled him to hang his body down towards the door of the van.

"The wind blew cold and sharp and, along with it, particles of coke which were carried from the engine found their way into my eyes, making me feel most uncomfortable. Suddenly, the engine emitted a

whistle and sent up a cloud of steam. There was now a change in the sound produced by the wheels — they numbed more loudly. Perhaps the train was passing over a bridge.

"It was pitch dark all around and visibility was as good as nil. In spite of all these handicaps, my companion Ramnath, succeeded in getting open the E.P. lock of the van. I held on, with all the strength at my command, to the end of the dhoti whose other end was tied round his waist. Next, the doors of the van were opened and Ramnath got inside. He soon managed to pick out the three packages containing the gold bars, and I hauled these up, one by one, with the aid of the dhoti, to which Ramnath tied them fast.

"At that moment, the cold wind pierced though my body like a pointed arrow. My hands and feet froze. But we were now in possession of the gold that we so ardently desired, and the prospect of so much wealth infused in us a feeling of warmth which served to mitigate to an extent the intensity of the cold. I held on to the hanging dhoti and, on finishing his job, Ramnath climbed to the roof of the van with its help. Thereafter, slowly sliding down from that position we again hid ourselves in our original places, close to the wheels."

Their dexterity in executing this daring robbery, not to mention the risk involved, can well be imagined if one stops to think how fast the train was moving. When its speed lessened a little on approaching the outer signal of Vindhychal Station, Ramnath and Shambhu stealthily dropped the packages by the side of the railway track. And, as the train was coming to a halt at the statoin, the four of them got down and walked fast towards the point where the packages had been dropped.

The night was dark, but what did that matter to them? Fortune had smiled broadly on them. They had won what all desire but few get. They were thrilled and excited. Soon, they reached the outer signal area

and stalked away towards a cluster of trees on one side under cover of the dark.

In the small hours of the night, they reached a ghat of the Ganga. There was only one boat there to take them to the other side, and the boatman was asleep. They awakened him and, paying him well, crossed the river. As they got out of the boat, they unpacked the three parcels, removed the gunny covering and the paper on which was written the address and which bore the stamps of the Railway. All this they consigned to the fast-flowing water.

After walking a little distance, they took an ekka to Gopiganj, from where they travelled by metre-gauge train to Allahabad City. There, the party broke up, each member going to his home.

The distribution of the gold took place some time later. All the members of the gang, having received their share of the booty, now gave themselves up to a life of gay abandon, lulled into a sense of perfect satisfaction and security.

Now it was the turn of the Police officials to set their shoulders to the wheel. Day and night they engaged themselves in the arduous task of bringing their investigations to a satisfactory conclusion. And, when in the course of searching the house of Sunder's relation gold bars bearing the seal of the Bank of Bikaner were discovered, the chase was on.

When Sunder was brought out of jail for interrogation and apprised of this new development, he quietly resigned himself to his fate. Hanging his head, he could only say: "Darogaji, I did not realise that you already knew everything. How can I now keep back anything from you?"

"Come clean then," the Station Officer of the Railway Police said sternly.

Confessing his part in the crime, Sunder said that there were six others involved in the robbery — Ramnath, Nanku, Bhagwaiti, Bichai, Kishore and Shambhu.

The Police now launched a vigorous search for

these men and they were all soon arrested. That Pasi in whose house were discovered the gold bars bearing the India Government stamp revealed certain facts which conclusively proved that the entire deed was the doing of Ramnath and his gang.

On the arrest of accused Bhagwati, some gold was found at his place, too. Confessing his role in the robbery, Bhagwati handed over a *hansli*, made out of this gold. He also told the Investigating Officer that he had paid off a long standing debt of Rs. 1,000 by selling part of his share of the theft.

Two-and-a-half seers of the stolen gold was recovered from Nanku's place. In addition to this, he had hidden away some of it in an ingenious manner. Gates had been put up on one of the main roads of Allahabad by fixing ballis and bamboos in the ground, for the reception of a barat. After the marriage, these ballis had been removed, and the pits dug for their erection were about a foot deep. In one of these pits, Nanku hid some of his gold, closing the opening with earth. Now, taking out the lump of gold from this pit and handing it over to the Police, he said that he had felt his gold to be as safe in that place as in any bank. For, whenever he felt the need for it, he could go and fetch it out from there.

Ramnath, the leader of the gang, proved a slippery customer, and could be arrested only a month latter, after much effort, at Kanpur. He had managed to keep himself in hiding, moving from place to place, during this period. With him, too, was found a lot of gold which bore the Ashoka seal of the Indian Government. A sharp chisel and hammer were also recovered from his possession.

The Police discovered more gold in the possession of other members of the gang — obviously their share in the theft. The Investigating Officer spared no pains in unearthing the true facts of the case. All the accused were convicted by the court.

Jewel-thief at large

THE Police Officer was reclining in the chair on a Sunday morning in his house, when the telephone buzzed. "Sir, this is Inspector Hazara Singh from Parliament Street Police Station. A daring case of burglary has taken place in the flats near the Officers' Mess last night. The burglars have left behind some clues. You may like to come over, sir."

"I am on my way. Please wait for me," said the Officer.

He quickly dressed up and drove to the Parliament Street Police Station.

Inspector Hazara Singh, with his usual broad smile, saluted him and narrated the incident in detail.

"The Army officer in that flat is shocked and his wife is in a dazed condition. Not a piece of gold, diamond or pearl has been spared. It has been a clean sweep," Hazara Singh said, stretching his right arm and waving it in the air.

"To the spot at once," the Officer ordered.

They drove to the Officers' Mess and then turned right to the road in front of a newly constructed row of flats. At the other end of the road was the flat, the scene of the crime. It was a neat little place in the lower storey, with polished grey mosaic floors and teak doors. A little lawn lay in front and surrounding it was thick hedge. The grounds on the northern side were open and undulated. Perhaps more construction work was contemplated as some bricks were stacked there and some foundations had been dug.

"Here, sir, see this footmark on the lawn," Hazara Singh pointed out to the Officer.

"Thanks to the drizzle last evening this footmark here is so clear. Look, the fellow has perhaps a thick toe, for his right heel has pressed more deeply into

the mud," the Officer remarked as he proceeded to examine the mark.

"Yes, sir."

"Are you sure this is the footmark of the criminal?"

"I imagine it is. The Major, too, thinks so," the Inspector replied.

Hazara Singh knelt on his knees to peer at the footmark. "You are right, sir. There is a deeper depression on the right side of the heel."

"We will question the Major later on. First, let's follow the track of these footmarks."

They followed the footmarks across the hedge. The impressions on the wet earth were fairly clear. The left footmarks were lighter and the right footmarks, too, were identical with those seen on the lawn with the right side of the heel pressing deeper than the rest of the foot. The foot-prints led them to a stack of bricks, but from this point onwards there were no marks.

"Hazara Singh, the story of this track seems to end here," spoke the Officer.

"Possibly, how disappointing! I'll go to the other side of the stack," he said, moving away with a swagger. After a minute or so, the Inspector shouted: "Sir, here I see some marks of canvas shoes instead of foot-prints."

"Please make sure. It should not turn out to be just a mare's nest. Measure the length of the footprint and then that of the shoe-mark," the Officer instructed.

Hazara Singh went to work on the two marks with a measuring-tape, and felt reassured by the thought that, possibly, the length of the shoe might have fitted the dimensions of the foot, for the right shoe appeared to have pressed more deeply at the heel in the wet ground.

"I am sure these are the marks of the same person. It is conceivable that the man might have put on canvas shoes, near this brick stack and then walked away," the Officer murmured.

"May be you are right, sir," Hazara paused for a moment and then exclaimed, "I have also my own deductions, sir. This intruder has either a short left leg and a longer right leg, or he habitually limps, putting more body weight on his right foot, specially near the heel."

"*Shubash!* That may well be correct, leave a man here to see that nobody disturbs these marks. We'll talk to the Major first and then take plaster impressions of these footprints and shoe-marks," suggested the Officer convincingly.

As they walked into the flat, the Officer noticed in the gallery a number of caps and hats on a rack. He stood there while Hazara Singh knocked. A young man in a dressing-gown opened the door.

"This is Major-Rajwade who resides here," Inspector Hazara Singh introduced him.

"You are a Major in the Army?" the Police Officer asked.

"Yes."

"You are in the Ordnance Corps?"

"How do you know that?"

"I will tell you later on. Meanwhile, can you please give me the details of this incident?"

"I don't know much. Both my wife and I returned late last night from a dance in the Mess. I slept like a log till my wife woke me up early in the morning," revealed Major Rajwade, his face pale and the lines on his cheeks from the side of the nose to the ends of the lips deep like furrows.

"You have not yet got over your hang-over, Major," Police Officer remarked.

"You are simply marvellous. You seem to know more about me than I can claim to know myself," he smiled and licked his parched lips. He continued, "This has been a terrible blow to us. All the jewellery of my wife is gone. But these women are also to blame. They go to the dance decked in the finest clothes and jewellery as if they were going to their own wedding.

And, on coming back, they throw these things about as though the ornaments were wreaths of withering flowers. You know..." The Major stopped short. "Come in, darling. Here is a senior Police Officer come to visit us," he said.

A slim, pretty lady walked into the room. She looked thoroughly upset and confused. Her hair dishevelled, one end of her sari dragging on the floor and a deep pallor rising on her face, she looked the embodiment of misery.

"Madam, may I enquire about the place where you kept your jewellery on return from the dance last night," the Police Officer asked.

"I kept my diamond rings on the dressing table and the pearl necklace, the ear-tops and my gold bangles in the drawers. It was out of sheer laziness that I put these expensive things in such an unsafe place. What a fool I was!" Her voice was choked and her fingers quivered as she spoke the words.

"Where do you usually keep your jewellery?"

"Mostly in the locker at the bank. But I had recently brought my ornaments here as there were a number of parties, dinners and other social engagements in the offing."

"What ornaments have been left behind by the burglar?"

"Only this ruby ring I am wearing and these glass bangles on my wrists. Alas! I am robbed and ruined," she threw up her fair arms and tears welled up in her large eyes.

"I'd like to see your dressing table," the Police Officer said.

They walked through the bedroom into the dressing room where the table with a large rectangular mirror was kept. The drawers were half drawn and the toilet articles on it had been upset and disarranged.

The Police Officer and Inspector carefully examined the table on all sides. It had not been moved from its place. There were very faint finger-prints on the

wooden handles of the drawers. Hazara Singh averred that they could not be developed as they were not clear. The Officer fixed his gaze on the large mirror. The dark green curtain of the doors opposite was being fully reflected in it. He noticed a small patch on the right corner of the mirror.

"Tell me, have you or has anybody else touched this table since discovering the theft?" the Officer asked.

"No, I was too grief-stricken and lay sobbing on my bed, and my husband remained busy telephoning to the police and chiding me for my carelessness," Mrs. Rajwade replied.

"Don't be upset. We will do our best. Look, Hazara Singh. I see some finger-prints on this mirror. They can certainly be developed. The mirror, according to Mrs. Rajwade, has not been touched by anybody else so far. Possibly, the finger-prints are that of the burglar. Be quick and arrange to develop and photograph them. In the meantime I will talk to Mr. Rajwade."

The Officer went round the house in search of further clues. The doors and windows of the bath-room adjoining the dressing-room were bolted. No attempt had been made to open them. On the floor near the bed were some very faint toe-marks while in the balcony was a light mud-soiled footmark like the one seen earlier on the lawn.

"Well, Major, you are in the habit of using your black beret more often than the peak cap, aren't you?" enquired the Police Officer.

"Good heavens! How do you get to know all this? You are quite right, I use my beret daily when I go for work."

"The thick grease-line on the beading of the beret led to the conclusion. The peak cap appears to be new and has not been used much. The crests on your caps show that you belong to the Ordnance Corps," disclosed the Officer wittingly.

"You have very keen powers of observation. Can

you please tell from where the thief got ingress into this house."

"Oh, yes! The burglar just climbed into the balcony and then got into your bedroom. He walked on tip-toe across the bedroom and then entered the dressing room where the booty was there for taking. He must have gone out the same way except that he treaded on your wet lawn where he has left a clear footprint."

"How do you know that he walked on tip-toe in the bedroom?"

"Because the marks on the floor there are of the toes only and not of the whole foot. Moreover, the door of your bedroom was perhaps neither locked nor latched."

"Excellent! Your deductions are unassailable. Yes, we had just closed the door of our bedroom and forgot to bolt it. All this is the outcome of our carelessness," said Major Rajwade.

"Mrs. Rajwade, please write down on a paper a complete description of the jewellery that has been stolen. Please be composed and write only what you recollect perfectly. Don't give incorrect information," the Police Officer requested.

She agreed and sat down on her bed to write. Meanwhile, the Police Officer enquired of Major Rajwade whether he had suspicions about any particular person, to which he replied "No".

Sending out plain-clothes men to keep an unobtrusive watch on the shops of jewellers, the Officer instructed Inspector Hazara Singh to devote all his attention to this case. At the headquarters of the Police office was prepared a statement of all cases of burglary and theft in Delhi in which jewellery had been stolen and in which the modus operandi had been entry into the house through doors or windows.

A study of this statement revealed some interesting facts, the most significant of them being that this type of case had increased in number in the last three

months. They had occurred mainly in the fashionable localities of Old and New Delhi, with the crime committed mostly in the night over the week-end. It was in alternate weeks that there was a spate of such cases — at times three or four burglaries occurring in one single night alone in a particular locality. Invariably, in all cases, the articles stolen were of gold and other jewellery easy to carry. No silverware or expensive silken dress was ever touched. For two days, the Officer studied these crime charts and statistics and formed all sorts of conclusions.

Late in the evening of the second day, Hazara Singh turned up with a limping labourer who, according to him had been working at the construction near Major Rajwade's flat. "Sir, his looks appeared suspicious. I observed his movements and found that he spent most of his time watching the Major's flat or looking at the skies instead of carrying the bricks. I questioned him and he did not give satisfactory answers to my queries."

"We will talk to him. But tell me, Hazara Singh, are there any other reasons to suspect him?" asked the Officer.

"No, nothing so far. But he limps on his right leg."

"Hazara Singh, let us then compare his footprints with the impressions we have taken in plaster."

The plaster plate was brought and the foot measurements of the man taken. They turned out to be half an inch smaller than the prints on the plaster. They looked down in despair at the result. The mystery of the case seemed to deepen.

It was on Tuesday morning the same week that a plain-clothes policeman, who was on detective duty in the street where the shop of a renowned jeweller of the city was situated, reported to the Police Officer that he had noticed a middle-aged man with dark glasses enter the store with a leather attache case. This man was dressed in European style and was at once ushered into the upper storey of the building. His mode of walk-

ing was peculiar as he limped on his right leg without in any way reducing his quick pace. His gait was of a kangaroo and his neck as long as the animal's. The plainclothes man learnt from the watchman of the shop that this man had been staying in the place for the last four days. He had been coming to the jeweller once every fortnight and would stay for three or four days. It was also learnt that he was a close friend of the jeweller's with whom he used to go out, mostly after nightfall. During day-time the man would rest in the room. A cloak of mystery hung over his person as he would not converse with anybody except the proprietor of the place. He appeared to be of a reserved nature and his movements remained mysterious and inexplicable.

The Police Officer at once decided to have a go at this curious character.

"You must shadow this man constantly. I am giving more policemen to help you in the job. Get in touch with me on telephone if anything interesting comes to notice. And keep your eyes open for a footprint or shoemark of the person," the Police Officer instructed the plainclothes man who had conveyed this interesting bit of information to him.

About noon-time the telephone rang.

'Can you hear me, sir? I have just noticed the footprint of the man. He came down the staircase at the back of the building. One of his slippers fell off. He limped along to pick it up and the marks of his foot were imprinted on the mud in the lane.'

"Keep a sharp watch. Don't let the footprints be obliterated. I am coming," replied the Police Officer.

Changing into civilian clothes, he rushed to the locality. Then, leaving his car at a distance, he sauntered down in a leisurely fashion. The plain-clothes man beckoned him to the spot and he knelt down to have a look at the footprints. Luckily, the print of the right foot was crystal clear in the mud, the deeper depression at the heel and more pressure on the right

side of the foot.

"Oh, this is marvellous. It must be preserved. Put another man to watch it."

"But, sir, look above. We are being watched. See that man with dark glasses.....," pointing to a person standing on the balcony above.

The man in question craned his long neck across the railing of the balcony and watched them for a time, but, the moment the Police Officer looked up, he quickly withdrew into the room.

"This may be our man. He is to be pursued."

"Just a moment. I will send my friend, the watchman to his room to find out what he is up to," suggested the plainclothes man.

"Yes, be quick!"

When the watchman returned after a surreptitious peep through a chink in the door, he informed that the man with dark glasses was packing up.

"We will go after him. First, let me get my car. You and two more policemen come with me." Saying so the Police Officer hurried to his car.

They had to wait for about an hour before the man with dark glasses came down to the main shop and ordered the watchman to get a taxi. As the cab drew up, he hurriedly put his luggage in and instructed the man at the wheel to drive away quickly. The car occupied by policemen followed the cab and soon the chase was on. The taxi took a circuitous route through wide roads and narrow streets till it was heading for the Delhi Main Railway Station.

At the station, the man purchased a first class ticket for Howrah. Jostling his way through a host of passengers, the man limped along so quickly that those who followed him had at times to run to keep pace with him. He now got into a first class coupe but, as he was about to close the door of the compartment the Police Officer rushed forward, shouting; "You there, stop. We want to search you and your baggage."

"Why should you search a gentleman? Who are

you and why are you after me? he queried.

"Climb down and then we will tell you," said the Police Officer.

"I will not. I have to reach Calcutta by tomorrow," he retorted, defiantly.

"You have to stay here. You are not going to Calcutta," the Police Officer insisted, dragging him out of the compartment. His luggage, consisting of a large canvas bag and a leather suitcase, was likewise brought out. When it was opened, the bag contained a bed sheet, pillow and two costly rugs and two pairs of shoes, of which one was of canvas. The suitcase, when emptied of clothes, revealed another small leather case, inside which was a varied collection of costly jewellery. Some of these articles tallied with those listed by M Rajwade as missing.

"All this is stolen property," the Officer shouted.

"No, no! I am a jeweller from Calcutta. I deal in pearls, emeralds and diamonds," the man argued.

"And we, for our part, catch those who deal in stolen goods," the Officer retorted.

As soon as the man with dark glasses realised that the game was up, he made a clean breast of the crime he had committed in Delhi. The foot-prints of his limping right foot tallied exactly with the impression that had been taken in plaster from Major Rajwade's mirror. His finger-prints were also identical with those found on the mirror of Mrs. Rajwade's dressing table.

Admitting his guilt in the case of burglary at M Rajwade's flat, he said, "As I was collecting the treasure from the dressing-table, the lady of the house stopped me and queried, 'Is that you, my dear?' Rising to the occasion, I at once replied; 'Yes, darling,' — and then stealthily walked out."

